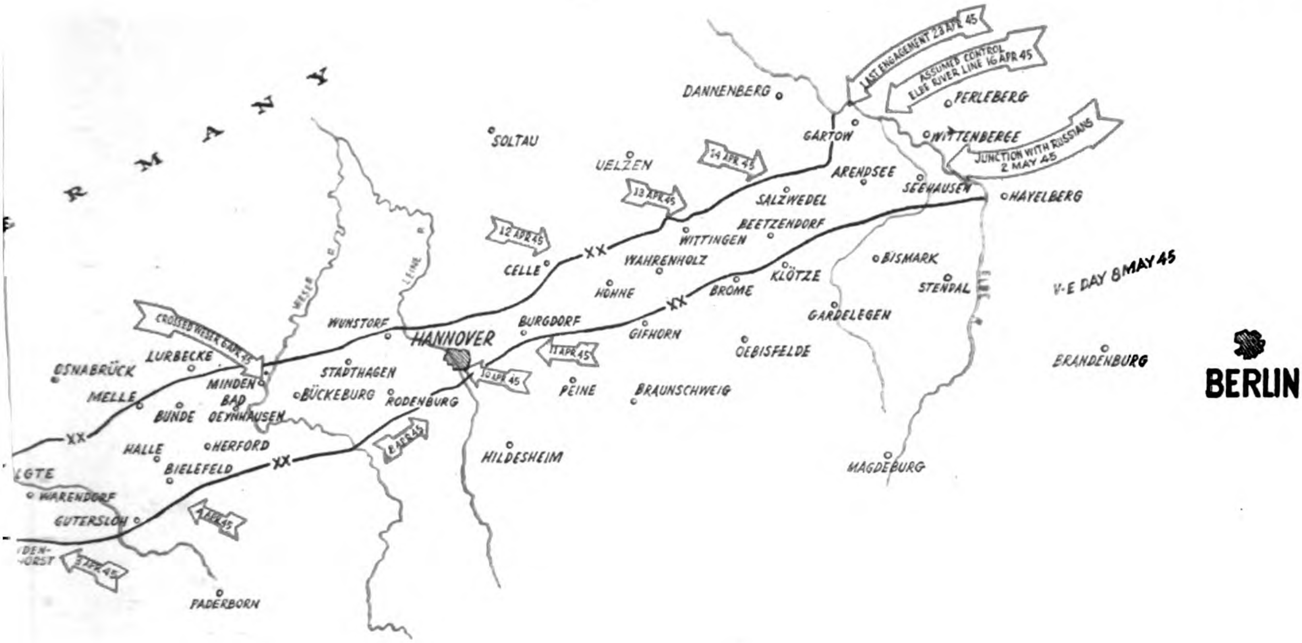


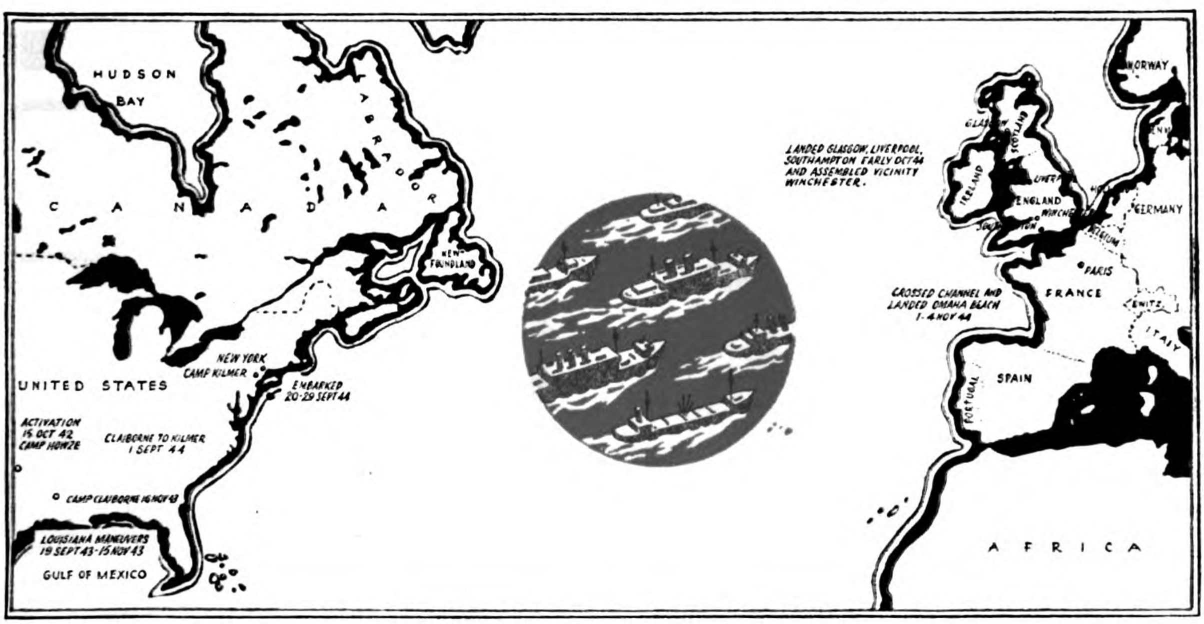
The 84th Infantry Division

FROM LOUISIANA TO THE ELBE





LAST ENGAGEMENT 23 APR 45
ASSUMED CONTROL ELBE RIVER LINE 16 APR 45
JUNCTION WITH RUSSIANS 2 MAY 45
DANNENBERG
PERLEBERG
WITTENBERGE
GARTOW
SOLTAU
UELZEN
14 APR 45
13 APR 45
12 APR 45
11 APR 45
10 APR 45
ARENDSEE
SEEHAUSEN
HAVELBERG
SALZWEDEL
BEETZENDORF
WITTINGEN
WAHRENHOLZ
CELLE
BISMARK
KLÖTZE
BROME
STENDAL
HÖHNE
V-E DAY 8 MAY 45
CROSSED WESER 6 APR 45
WUNSTORF
HANNOVER
BURGDORF
GIFHORN
GARDELEGEN
OEBISFELDE
BRANDENBURG
BERLIN
OSNABRÜCK
LURBECKE
MINDEN
STADTHAGEN
MELLE
BAD OEYNHAUSEN
BÜCKEBURG
RODENBURG
PEINE
BRAUNSCHWEIG
BUNDE
HALLE
HERFORD
BIELEFELD
HILDESHEIM
MAGDEBURG
WARENDORF
GUTERSLOH
PADERBORN



HUDSON BAY
CANADA
LABRADOR
NEWFOUNDLAND
UNITED STATES
NEW YORK CAMP KILMER
EMBARKED 20-29 SEPT 44
ACTIVATION 15 OCT 42 CAMP HOWZE
CLAIBORNE TO KILMER 1 SEPT 44
CAMP CLAIBORNE 16 NOV 43
LOUISIANA MANEUVERS 19 SEPT 43-15 NOV 43
GULF OF MEXICO
LANDED GLASGOW, LIVERPOOL, SOUTHAMPTON EARLY OCT 44 AND ASSEMBLED VICINITY WINCHESTER.
NORWAY
IRELAND
SCOTLAND
ENGLAND
GERMANY
BELGIUM
PARIS
FRANCE
CROSSED CHANNEL AND LANDED OMAHA BEACH 1-4 NOV 44
SPAIN
PORTUGAL
ITALY
AFRICA


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From the Foreword by Major General Bolling—

"In the 84th Infantry Division, a unique experiment was attempted. As soon as the division was sent into combat, our own historical section was formed. It was encouraged to go direct to the source, to the men themselves, from the commanding general to any private, for the most complete, firsthand information on every action.

"This book is largely based on hundreds of pages of such interviews, most of them within 48 hours of the unit's relief and many of them while the unit was still fighting.

"Primarily, this history is meant for the men who made it. The war was a tremendous experience for all of us and it will enrich that experience to get a full understanding of it.

"It is possible to get closer to the *real* war in a division history than on any other level. A division is high enough in the scale of military organization to observe the effects of the most general strategic planning and low enough to watch how the plans worked out in the smallest detail.

"In the case of the 84th, almost every type of land warfare can be studied—offensive, defensive, fortified positions, open warfare, break-throughs and river crossings.

"I am sure that our men will not be the only ones to find this history interesting and important. It will hand on our experiences to our children and tell them that we did not fight in vain."

THE 84th INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE BATTLE OF GERMANY

THE 84th INFANTRY DIVISION IN



THE BATTLE OF GERMANY

November 1944 — May 1945

BY

LT. THEODORE DRAPER

MAPS AND DRAWINGS BY SGT. WALTER H. CHAPMAN

FOREWORD BY MAJOR GENERAL A. R. BOLLING

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TO THE RAILSPLITTERS



WHO NEVER CAME BACK

FOREWORD

OUR army has always fought much better than it has written. In this war, for the first time, a large-scale effort has been made in the various historical sections of the armed forces to gather and organize the material for a permanent record of our many-sided achievement. Most of these historical sections, however, have worked on an army level or higher.

In the 84th Infantry Division, a unique experiment was attempted. As soon as the division was sent into combat, our own historical section was formed. It was more than a repository for the written records of the division, though that was one of its duties. It was encouraged to go direct to the source, to the men themselves, from the commanding general to any private, for the most complete, firsthand information on every action. This book is largely based on hundreds of pages of such interviews, most of them within 48 hours of the unit's relief and many of them while the unit was still fighting.

Primarily, this history is meant for the men who made it. In the heat of battle, it is impossible for any man to see all the sides of a battle. Some people see too much of the "big picture," some too much of the "little" ones. To see the whole action, and especially the whole operation, it is necessary to piece together many different types of information and experiences.

In this sense, we owe to every man who fought with us a report of what we did together and why. The war was a tremendous experience for all of us, and it will enrich that experience to get a full understanding of it.

I should like to stress what we did *together*. If there is *a* hero in this book, it is the division as a whole. If there are many heroes, they are the various units of the division. The American soldier is peculiar in this respect. In a story of any action, he likes to see his division mentioned by name, his regiment, his battalion, and above all, his company or battery. If Company K of the 3rd Battalion of the 333rd or 334th or 335th Infantry took a town, he wants to see the credit go where it belongs. If he was a member of that company or battery, he would feel cheated if it were left out. He does not care so much about his own name but he does insist on the name of his unit.

This book has been written with that in mind. The general reader may find the units a bit abstract but he should remember that they are dear and precious to the men who were in them.

THE INFANTRY DIVISION

A BRIEF note on infantry organization may be helpful to the nonmilitary reader.

A modern infantry division has approximately 14,000 men. About 60 per cent are infantrymen; the rest are artillery men, engineers, medical aid men, reconnaissance troops, signal men, quartermaster and ordnance men. It is therefore a much more balanced force than the name may imply.

In addition, special units, such as tanks, tank destroyers, and anti-aircraft, may be attached to the division for specific missions. These function as an integral part of the division as long as they are with it. It is therefore a much greater striking force than the name may imply.

Below the division level the units are:

REGIMENT. Three infantry regiments and the division artillery are the main units of the division. A regiment has approximately 3,000 men.

BATTALION. Three battalions and four separate companies make up one regiment. A battalion has approximately 850 men.

COMPANY. Five companies make up one battalion. The companies include three rifle companies, one heavy weapons company, and one headquarters company. A company has approximately 180 men.

BATTERY. In the artillery, the battery corresponds to the company in the infantry, but a battery has only approximately 100 men.

PLATOON. Four platoons make up one company. A platoon has approximately 40 men.

SQUAD. Three squads make up one platoon. A squad has 12 men.

Above the division level the units are:

CORPS. Two or more divisions may make up one corps.

ARMY. Two or more corps may make up one army.

ARMY GROUP. Two or more armies may make up one army group.

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PHOTOGRAPHS AND WASH DRAWINGS

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If there are any leading characters in this story, they are the units of the Division. In the 84th Infantry Division, the cast of characters was:

333rd Infantry Regiment

334th Infantry Regiment

335th Infantry Regiment

84th Division Artillery

325th Field Artillery Battalion

326th Field Artillery Battalion

909th Field Artillery Battalion

309th Engineer Combat Battalion

309th Medical Battalion

84th Reconnaissance Troop

84th Division Headquarters Company

84th Quartermaster Company

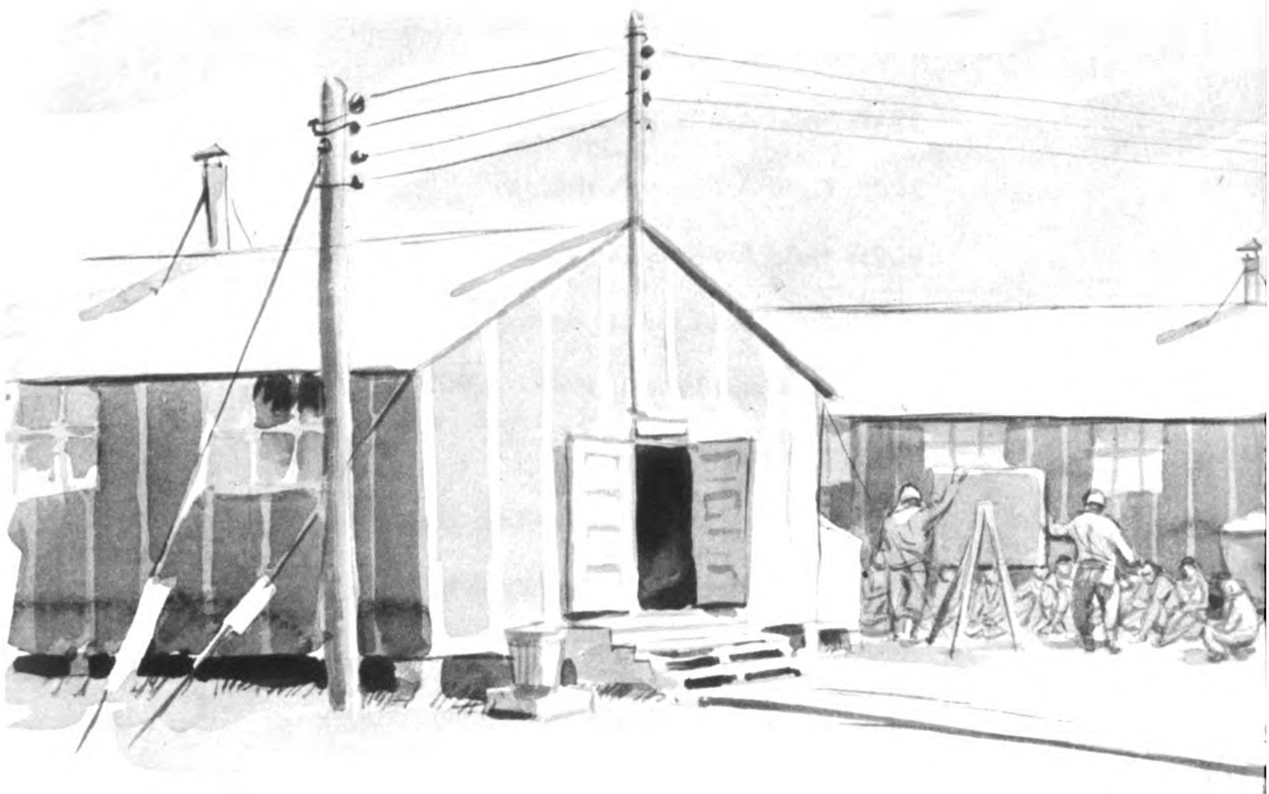
84th Signal Company

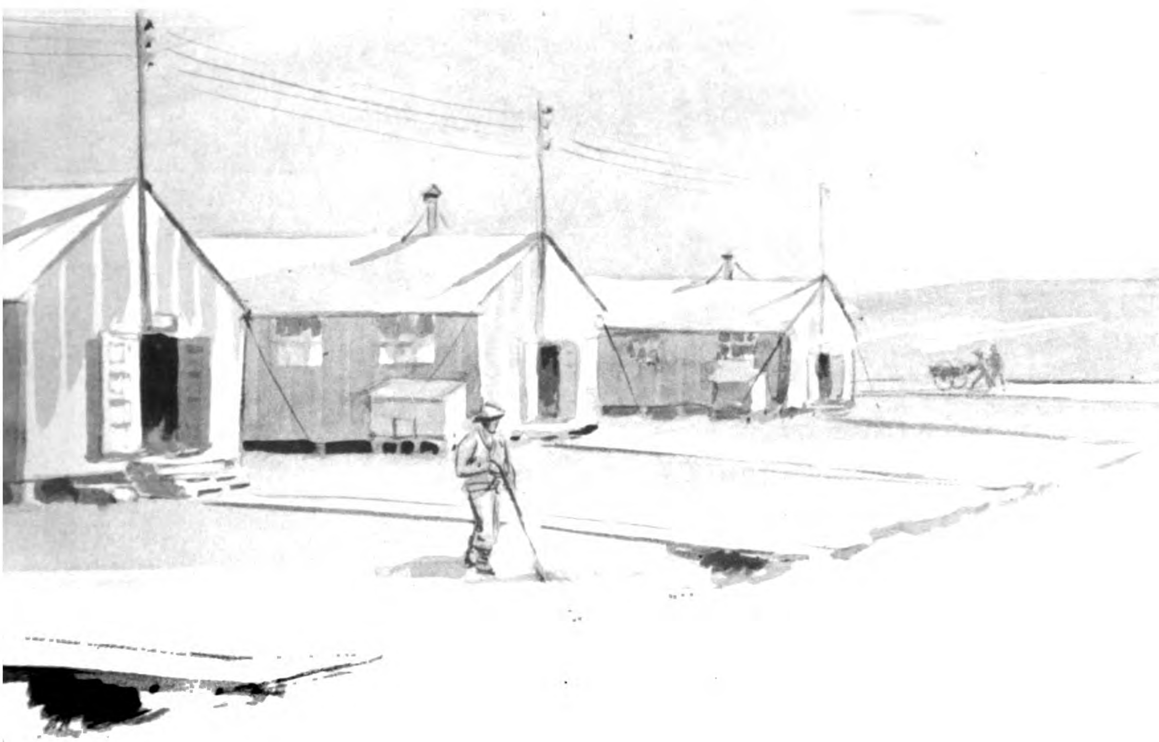
784th Ordnance Light Maintenance Company

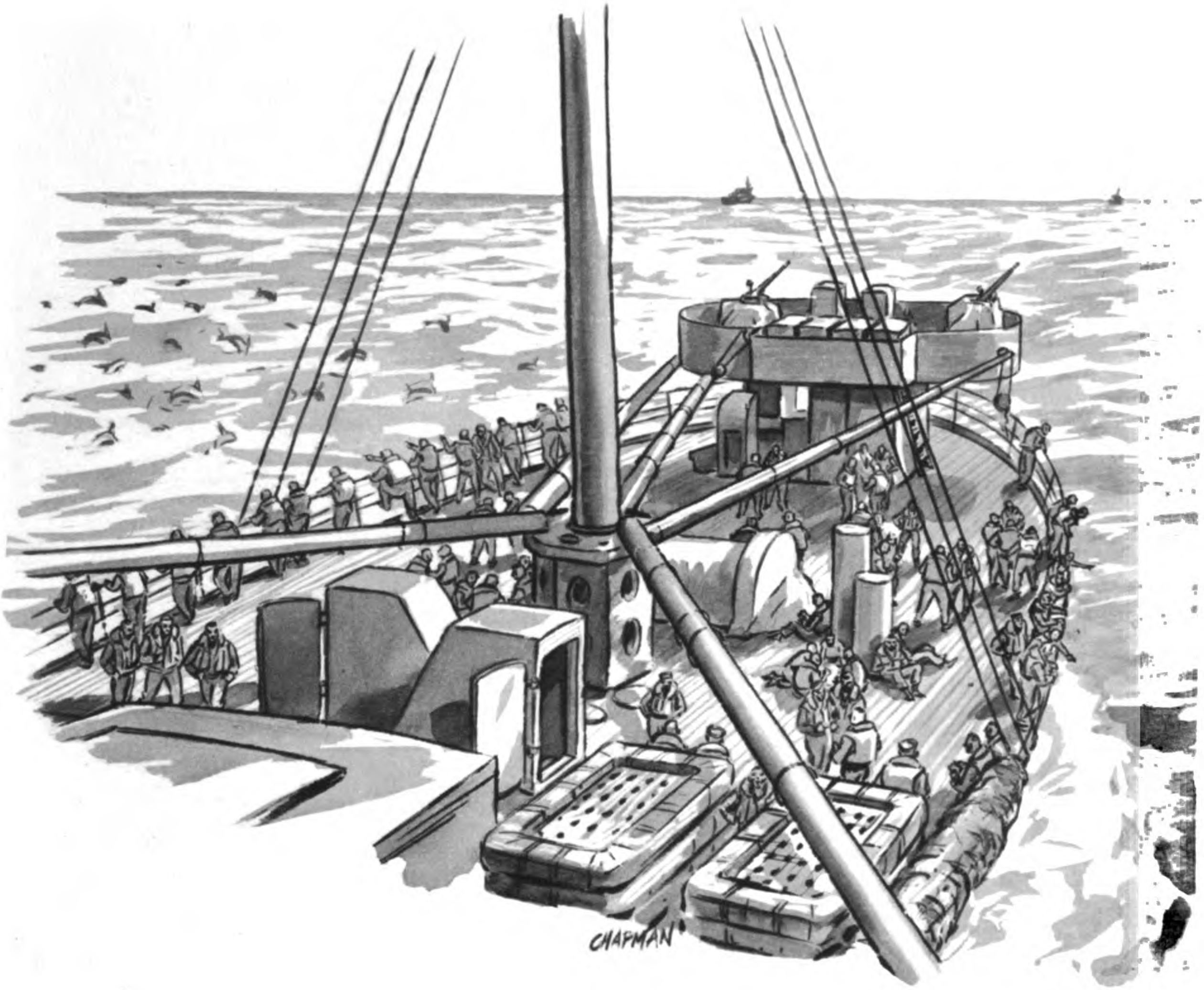
557th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion (attached)

638th Tank Destroyer Battalion (attached)

771st Tank Battalion (attached)






CHAPMAN

INTRODUCTION

THIS is a combat history. It is the story of a division from its first day of fighting to its last. To men who were in the line without a break for 171 days, anything in the army before combat is slightly unreal, anything after combat is anticlimax. Nevertheless, most of our men spent two years of their lives in training camps at home before they went overseas. Although the difference between training and combat is vast and sharp, like the difference between reading about dying and dying, those six months would have been impossible without those two years.

This is a brief background of the division before combat. The sights, the sounds, and the smell of war have been left for the fighting story.

The 84th Infantry Division was born on August 3, 1917, in the War Department's General Order No. 101 which laid the basis for the World War I Army of the United States. Its first commander was Major General Harry C. Hale, a veteran of the Philippine campaign. Its first G-3 (Operations) was Major (now General) Walter Krueger, commander of the Sixth Army in the Pacific.

In the last war, the 84th was called the "Lincoln Division" because its men came from Kentucky, Indiana, and southern Illinois. Lincoln was born in Kentucky, self-educated in Indiana, and first attracted public attention in Illinois. Its original insignia was rather complicated—a red ax on a white background with a red circle, the name "Lincoln" above the ax and the number "84" below it. By a process of simplification, the present insignia was developed. The ax was borrowed from the old "Lincoln" patch, but a split rail on a red background was added. The memory of Lincoln was still there, but the 84th became the "Railsplitter" division.

In World War I, the 84th trained at two camps, first at Camp Zachary Taylor, Kentucky, about 5 miles from Louisville, and then at Camp Sherman, Ohio. Training was started on November 1, 1917, but time and equipment were lacking to make it as thorough as it was 25 years later. Nevertheless, in March 1918, five months later, the 84th began to send a large number of its men overseas. In fact, it became a type of replacement pool. So many men were sent out that at times not enough were left for drill.

It was generally believed that the 84th would never go overseas—exactly

the same feeling was current in 1944—but in August 1918 orders were unexpectedly received to prepare for overseas movement. On September 21, most of the 84th arrived at Liverpool, the rest at Glasgow. It spent about two days in British camps near Winchester and Romsay—another striking similarity to this war—and left Southampton for Cherbourg and Le Havre. By the end of September, it was quartered near Bordeaux and expected to get more specialized training in preparation for early combat.

But the 84th had arrived in France at a critical moment. The Meuse-Argonne offensive and an epidemic of influenza had brought on a dangerous shortage of men in the line divisions. Hunting for replacements, the American command was forced to drain newly arrived divisions like the 84th. On October 4, 9500 men and 75 officers were transferred to other outfits and General Hale himself was sent to command the 26th Infantry Division.

Most of the men of the old 84th, then, fought in World War I but not in the 84th. The last 84th man was discharged in July 1919.

In World War II, a second birthday was due. On August 27, 1942, the War Department issued an announcement that two new divisions would be formed in October. One of these was the 84th Infantry Division. On October 15, 1942, the 84th was activated at Camp Howze, Texas, about 60 miles north of Dallas.

The first commanding general of the 84th was Brigadier General (now Major General) John H. Hilldring, a veteran of Château-Thierry. The assistant division commander was Colonel (now Brigadier General) Nelson M. Walker. The artillery commander was Colonel (now Brigadier General) Ivan L. Foster. Most of the original complement of men came from California, Arkansas, Georgia, Texas, and Louisiana. By January 4, 1943, when a 13-week basic training course was started, about 16,000 men had reported for duty. General Hilldring was transferred on February 12, 1943, and replaced a week later by Brigadier General Stonewall Jackson (no relation to the Civil War hero), who had supervised the plebiscite in Silesia in 1919 to determine whether it would belong to Germany or Poland.

From Camp Howze, after basic training, the 84th went to the Louisiana maneuver area, near Merryville, for eight weeks of large-scale "war games," beginning September 19, 1943. The maneuver period was divided into seven phases or "problems," designed to complete the organization and sharpen the combat efficiency of the 84th and at least three other divisions. The climax of this training came in the form of so-called "free maneuvers," combining the operations of infantry, artillery, tank destroyers, and other

branches. Perhaps the most important problem was a river crossing in which a team of infantry and artillery established a bridgehead over the Sabine River and held it against strong "enemy" pressure.

In the midst of the Louisiana maneuvers, on October 4, 1943, General Jackson was killed in an airplane crash. He was replaced by Brigadier General Nelson M. Walker (later killed in Normandy). It was during these maneuvers, in November, that Brigadier General Alexander R. Bolling, who commanded the division throughout combat, joined the 84th as assistant division commander.

After the maneuvers were completed, the 84th did not return to Camp Howze. Instead, it moved, on November 15, 1943, to a permanent home at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, in the middle of the state near the city of Alexandria. Camp Claiborne, named after the first elected governor of Louisiana, was the former home of the 164th Infantry, which fought at Guadalcanal, as well as of the 34th Infantry Division and the 82nd Airborne Division, both of which took part in the European Campaign.

Five days later, on November 20, 1943, Brigadier General (now Major General) Robert B. McClure came to the 84th from the southwest Pacific and took command. It was time for more training. In February 1944 the division's three component infantry regiments, the 333rd, 334th, and 335th, went out into the field for "small unit training" to test the effectiveness of individual platoon leaders. The training ground was the swamps and hills near the camp. The unit leaders were strictly on their own throughout the tests. Virtually all movements were made at night and camouflage was stressed. General McClure left the division on March 5, 1944, and General Bolling assumed temporary command. On March 17, 1944, Major General Roscoe B. Woodruff, a former corps commander in the European theater, took command of the division.

Early in April 1944 the 84th was strengthened materially by the assignment of 2800 former A.S.T.P. men. They were distributed among the three infantry regiments and given five weeks special training. As a group, their age and academic training made them welcome additions. The first commander of the division artillery, Brigadier General Foster, was replaced in the same month by Colonel (now Brigadier General) Charles J. Barrett, the first chief of staff. The new chief of staff was Lt. Col. (now Colonel) Louis W. Truman, former Secretary, General Staff Headquarters, Army Ground Forces.

Beginning April 1944 the 84th undertook a still more intensive training program. For the first time since the Louisiana maneuvers, the division as a

whole went out into the field on a series of problems for two weeks of each month. In July hundreds of men were taught how to swim in order to avoid losses in amphibious operations. In August, the entire division received three days training in air transport operations, including the use of parachutes and the loading of equipment in planes.

General Woodruff left the 84th on June 11. The fifth and last commanding general was General Bolling, for more than half a year the assistant division commander. The new assistant division commander was Brigadier General William A. McCulloch, a veteran of Guadalcanal and Bougainville.

Late in August 1944 the 84th received its orders for overseas movement. All phases of its training were completed before the movement started. By September, the entire division had moved to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, its staging area.

The advance detachment sailed on September 11. The first units left Camp Kilmer in an army transport on September 18. The remainder of the division sailed the following day. Although the 84th originally was scheduled to land at Cherbourg, France, the crowded conditions at that port made it impossible and the troop ships landed at various ports in England instead. One of the division's transports was the first army troop ship to enter the English Channel and land at Southampton in World War II. Other units landed at Liverpool and Scotland. An accident at sea forced one of the ships to return to New York harbor so that the entire division was not assembled in England until October.

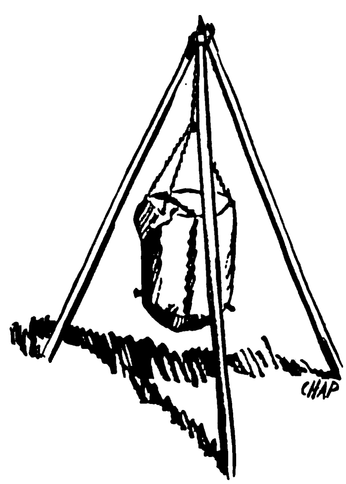
The 84th stayed in southern England for about three weeks. The division headquarters was established in Winchester and the units were quartered in the vicinity. Personnel to form ten provisional quartermaster truck companies left the division in mid-October and operated as part of the "Red Ball Express" in France until November 2. These drivers went to France a few hours after their arrival in England. They were met there by the assistant division commander who served all through combat, Brigadier General John H. Church, a veteran of four invasions, Sicily, Salerno, Anzio, and southern France. Commanded by General Church, approximately 1900 men and 100 officers handled more than 2800 tons of freight over more than 300,000 miles. In a sense, this was the 84th's first direct contribution in combat.

Rarely if ever has a division been moved from a training camp into combat with such speed as the 84th. On November 1, the first units landed at Omaha Beach, France. The others came over in the next three days.

The crossings were made in LST's, LCT's, and Liberty Ships from the ports of Southampton and Portland. The entire division was assembled in Normandy by November 4.

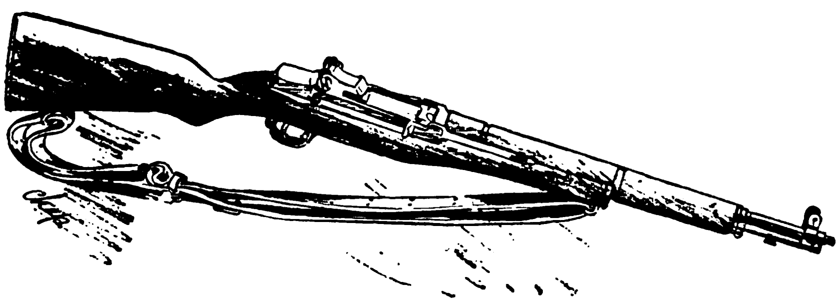
Most of the 84th stayed in France for only 48 hours. On November 5 and 6, the 84th moved through France and Belgium to Holland. By November 10, it was assembled again in the vicinity of Gulpen, about 15 miles from the front. That same night, however, the 335th Infantry and the 909th Field Artillery, which were attached temporarily to the 30th Infantry Division, were sent into the line near Aachen. Eight days later, the turn for the remainder of the 84th came. One infantry regiment and one artillery battalion, then, were fighting in Germany ten days after landing in France, the division as a whole less than three weeks after.

On the eve of combat, the 84th's General Staff was made up of Lt. Col. Joseph E. Williams, G-1 (Personnel), Lt. Col. Donald W. Coons, G-2 (Intelligence), Lt. Col. Ole W. Danielson, G-3 (Operations), and Lt. Col. James E. Channon, G-4 (Supply). Except for G-1, which was taken over in November by Major (now Lt. Col.) Hilmar A. Pressler, there were no changes in the General Staff throughout combat. A complete list of the command may be found in Appendix II.



Part One

THE SIEGFRIED LINE



CHAPTER I

The Big Picture

EVERY big battle is made up of little battles, but it is not always clear what relation the little ones have to the big one. Sometimes the big battle seems to have a life of its own and the little ones do not add up. You have to stand off from the parts and try to see them as a whole before they make sense and fall into a distinct pattern. Much of the fighting in the North African desert was like that.

But there are times when you cannot know what the battle was really like until you get down to the battalions, the companies, or even the platoons. The little battle is like a perfectly clear pool in which you can see the "big picture" at the bottom. Above all, there is one immense advantage in paying the closest attention to the "little picture." Everything becomes more concrete, more realistic. It is not so easy to make vague and sweeping generalities.

What is little and what is big in a battle depends, of course, on where you happen to be looking from. In the battle of Germany, in which many armies were involved, the story of a single division was relatively "little." No division can claim to tell the whole story or even a major part of it. But there were several divisions which played a role that was a red thread through the entire campaign. The 84th Infantry Division was one of them.

In general, the battle of northern Germany passed through four major phases:

The Siegfried Line (November-December 1944)
The Ardennes (December 1944-January 1945)
From the Roer to the Rhine (February-March 1945)
From the Rhine to the Elbe (April-May 1945)

The 84th was in every one of these phases from beginning to end. Its experiences were always typical, sometimes crucial. It is possible, therefore, to see the continuous line of the battle in the story of a single division.

June to November

Before the battle of Germany, there was the battle of France. The 84th was not involved in the French campaign, but some things may be clearer if the background is sketched in.

The first Allied landings in Normandy were made on June 6, 1944. Five days later, a firm beach was established. For about five weeks, the struggle from the beachhead through the hedgerows as far as St. Lô, halfway down the peninsula, was slow, painful, and costly. At the end of July, the narrow corridor between St. Lô and the sea was broken through. As far as the Seine, the enemy still tried to fight delaying actions but he was driven back irresistibly. Paris fell August 25. The wild ride through the rest of France and Belgium began. The war became a race to the German frontier. Automatically American supply lines stretched thinner and thinner, the German lines shortened. Out of gas, American units had to make the last few miles to the border on foot.

The German frontier was crossed south of Aachen on September 12. First the Allies tried to avoid a direct assault on the Siegfried Line by launching a daring, outflanking movement around the northern Netherlands end. The attempt to cross the Rhine at Arnhem, then turn east into northern Germany, just barely failed by the first week of October. It was necessary to bore through the line when it could not be turned. The first step was at Aachen. The better part of a month was spent on the encirclement and strangulation of the city. When it fell on October 21, a slim foothold on German soil was won. The main job of cracking or crunching the Siegfried Line was ahead.

The victory at Aachen was the work of the XIX Corps and VII Corps of the First Army. It was clear that the new Allied front on the German border was so long that it had to be filled in with new forces. In the last week of October, the Ninth Army, commanded by Lieutenant General William H. Simpson, which was first tried out at Brest, was brought to the Dutch province of Limburg, or, as it is better known in military history, the "Maastricht appendix." The XIX Corps, commanded by Major General Raymond S. McLain, was transferred to the Ninth Army. The XIII Corps, commanded by Major General Alvan C. Gillem, Jr., also attached to the new army, was made up of two divisions which had arrived only recently in Europe. One was the 102nd Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Frank A. Keating. The other was the 84th Infantry Division, commanded by Major

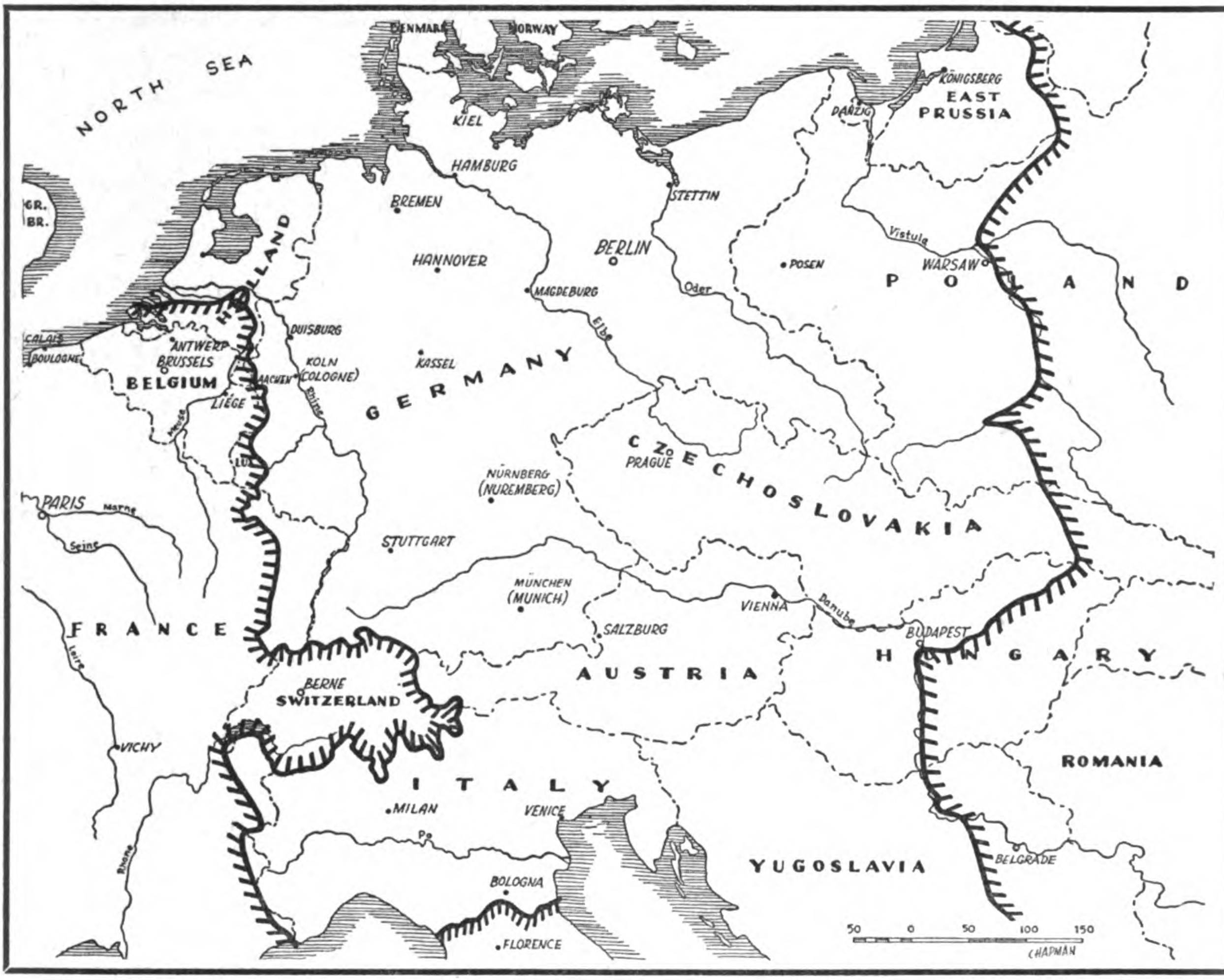
General Alexander R. Bolling. The Ninth Army was wedged in between the British 2nd Army on the left and the American First Army on the right. Roughly the Ninth was in a position to attack toward the lower Rhine, the First Army toward the middle Rhine, and the Third Army the upper Rhine.

Meanwhile, the enemy was wasting no time. Soon after the Allied landings in Normandy, in July, the Gestapo chief, Heinrich Himmler, became Germany's manpower dictator. By widening the army's age limits, by combing industry for every man who could be spared and many who could not, by cutting the huge training system to the bone, Himmler attempted to make up for losses suffered in the exhausting struggle in Normandy and the headlong retreat to the German frontier. By November, about 50 new infantry divisions and a dozen panzer brigades were formed. At least five panzer divisions and five parachute divisions were reorganized. Probably half of these new forces were sent to the western front to bolster up the Siegfried Line. The enemy was at last fighting on his own soil and he was less than 50 miles from his chief source of supplies, the Ruhr. We were more than 400 miles from Cherbourg, our only port for supplies that had to come as much as 4000 miles, and our men had to throw themselves against the most formidable fortifications in the world. Therefore, the battle of the Siegfried Line, which opened in November, was far from unequal. Once the rout in France was finished, the Nazi regime was able to inflate German morale by promising that the western allies could be bled white in futile assaults on the Siegfried Line and could be forced to come to terms.

Such was the general position on the eve of the 84th's entrance into the battle (Map 1). From a distance, the European war was practically finished in November 1944. To the men who came to Germany in November, however, it was just the beginning.

Field Order No. 3

Every time a major action is planned, a "field order" is issued. By its very nature, very few men ever get to see one. It originates at division level in the G-3 (Operations) section and goes only as far down the line as regiment. The regiments issue their own field orders to their battalions. The regimental order is based on the division order, the division order on the corps order, the corps order on the army order, and so on. A field order is a battle on paper, probably the most momentous piece of paper a headquarters can issue. It is the thing that sends men into combat.



1. THE WAR IN EUROPE, NOVEMBER 16, 1944

The divison's Field Order No. 1 sent the 84th from Normandy to Holland. Field Order No. 2 sent us into an assembly area around Palenberg and Ubach, Germany. Field Order No. 3 sent us into our first battle. It was issued at 1 p.m., November 12. It was one portion of the master plan for the first great assault on the Siegfried Line in the sector north of Aachen.

It is surprising how simple and clear the grand lines of strategy usually are. This one was no exception. The mission of the Ninth Army's offensive in November was to break through the Siegfried Line to the Roer River and establish bridgeheads at the towns of Linnich and Julich. Linnich was 10 miles east of Geilenkirchen. To get to Julich, it had to push a little farther.

What it was trying to do was not very complicated but, of necessity, how it was going to do so was.

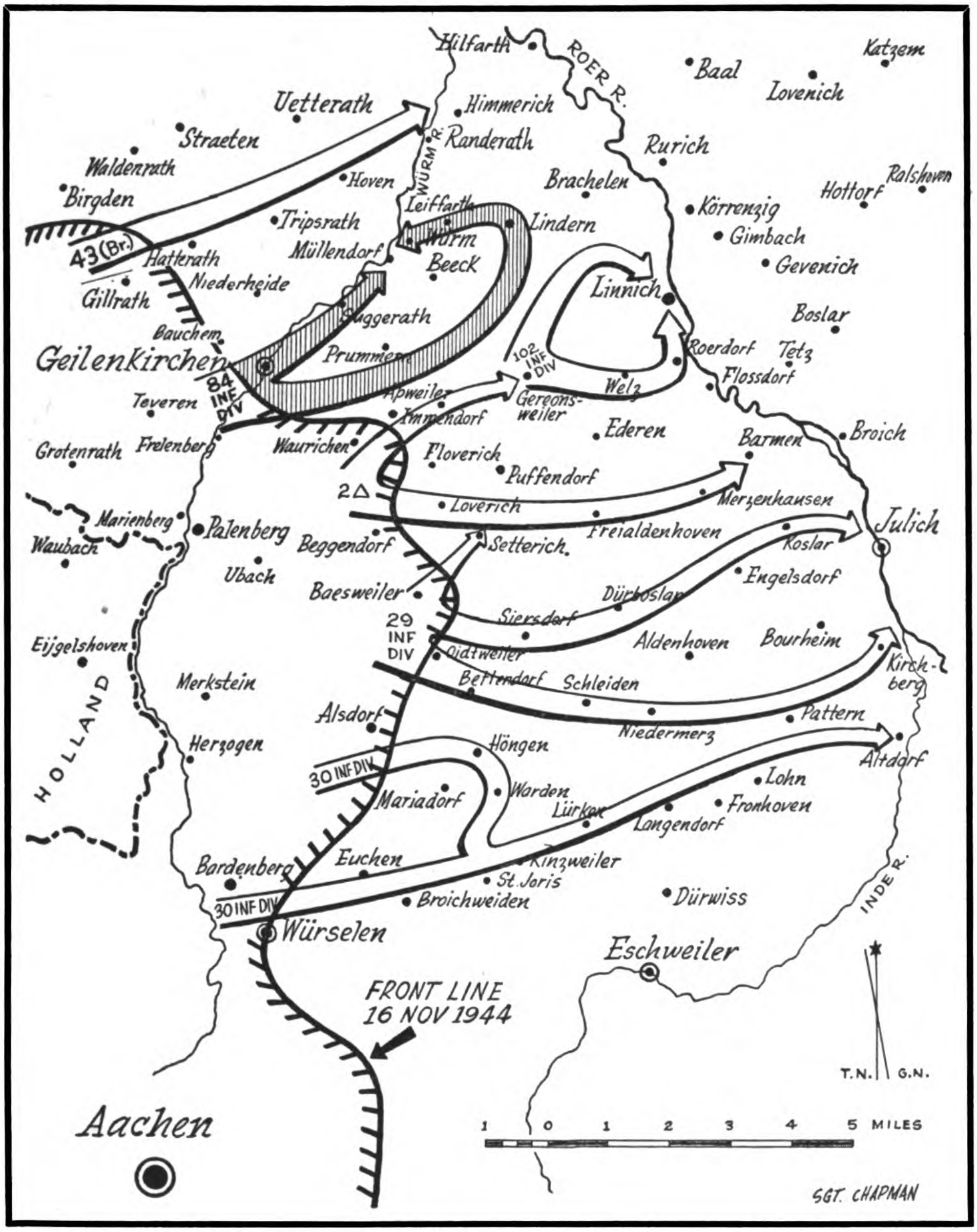
This operation was planned to involve three Corps, XIX, XIII, and 30 (British) Corps (Map 2). The main effort was assigned to the XIX Corps which had three veteran divisions, the 2nd Armored Division, the 30th Infantry Division, and the 29th Infantry Division, all outstanding in the Normandy campaign and in the break-through west of St. Lô. As planned, the XIX Corps would open the offensive by jumping off to establish a bridgehead at Julich. The 29th and 30th Divisions were to make a combined attack on Julich itself, the 29th in the center of the corps aiming at the town itself, the 30th on the southern flank below it. On the corps' northern flank, the 2nd Armored would push north and northeast to Gereonsweiler and Barmen. By going as far as Gereonsweiler, the 2nd Armored would stop about 2 miles from Linnich. At that point, the XIII Corps was to pass through the XIX Corps to take Linnich itself.

The mission of the 2nd Armored Division created an interesting problem. At Immendorf toward the north, our lines bent westward very sharply, forming a salient with the tip at Geilenkirchen. By striking in the direction of Gereonsweiler, the 2nd Armored was bound to exaggerate this salient, which was suspended like a dagger in the back of the XIX Corps. The elimination of this salient was, therefore, essential to the drive toward Gereonsweiler and Linnich; the farther the drive to the bridgehead, the more dangerous the salient. The mission of clearing the Geilenkirchen salient was given to the 84th Infantry Division and the 43 (British) Division. While the 84th was striking at the snout of the salient from the south, the 43rd would smash at its side from the west.

To sum up, the mission of the XIX Corps was to establish the bridgehead at Julich and to advance within striking distance of Linnich. The mission of the XIII Corps was to pass through the XIX Corps to establish the bridgehead at Linnich. The mission of the 30 (British) Corps was to facilitate the movements of the XIX and XIII Corps by reducing the Geilenkirchen salient.

Although the 84th was attached to the XIII Corps, it was placed initially under the operational control of the 30 (British) Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General B. G. Horrocks. Actually, only about two-thirds of the division represented the 84th in the first eight days because the 335th Combat Team,* which included the 909th Field Artillery, was still attached

* *A "combat team" is like a division in miniature. It is generally organized around an infantry regiment and an artillery battalion but has attached units such as a medical company, an engineer platoon, etc.*



2. OPERATION CLIPPER

to the 30th Infantry Division. At this point, the 84th received the 557th AAA Battalion and the 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion as attachments. Both stayed with us to the end and every action of the division involved a portion of these two units.

It was a matter of some satisfaction that the 84th was thrown into the battle on a major mission no more than three weeks after its arrival in France. New divisions usually were placed in a relatively quiet sector to give them the experience of enemy fire with a minimum of danger. The 84th was one of the few exceptions to the rule.

The Siegfried Line

After the collapse of German arms in France, the fierce, prolonged defense of Aachen was important to the enemy in at least two ways. It encouraged him to think that all hope of stubborn, extended resistance inside Germany was not gone. The myth of the "inner fortress" was born. Although Aachen itself had to be given up, it was a moral shot in the arm. If every city and town in Germany had to be taken the way Aachen was taken, the war was far from over. But Aachen was also important strategically. Behind Aachen, north and south, was the Siegfried Line. After the mad chase across France, it was necessary for the enemy to win a breathing space to man the elaborate chain of fortifications and to reorganize his tired, disorganized forces behind the line. Aachen was the gong which opened the battle of Germany.

The depth of the Siegfried Line varied but it was never quite as deep as German propaganda had hinted. In the Geilenkirchen area, which interested us primarily, the main works of the Siegfried Line were placed between two rivers, the Würm and the Roer. The Würm, a relatively slender stream from 16 to 33 feet wide and from 2½ to 5 feet deep, was not a major obstacle but it was the main terrain feature near the frontier. Geilenkirchen, about 5 miles from the frontier, was cut in half by the Würm, which became the first natural obstacle around which the outposts of the Siegfried Line were organized. East of Geilenkirchen, the enemy was able to fall back to another river line and a much more formidable one than the Würm. This was the Roer, in most places three times as wide as the Würm. Although the Roer was still too far away to hold our main attention at the time, it was destined to become the chief bogy of the campaign in northern Germany.

Between the Würm and the Roer, the Geilenkirchen area is relatively flat, lacking any well-defined ridge system. As a result, apart from the two rivers, the defenses had to be organized around towns, villages, and fragments of villages. By carefully placing his gun positions, pillboxes, and other

defense works, the enemy was able to take advantage of sweeping fields of fire which needed practically no clearing. On the other hand, even our observation posts were frequently exposed to direct fire from the enemy. This meant that there were times, many times, when we had to cross 2000 or more yards of perfectly open ground while the enemy was waiting for us on and behind a slight rise in ground which gave him all the trumps. It was bad tank country, because the tanks were always too exposed, and it was bad infantry country, because the infantry had to take over most of the burden.

The defense works of the Siegfried Line on the western side of the Roer were much more elaborate and much deeper than those on the eastern side. At Geilenkirchen, the distance from the Würm to the Roer was about 7 miles. On the eastern side of the Roer, the fortifications did not extend in depth for more than 3 miles. At this point, then, the effective depth of the Siegfried Line was approximately 10 miles. Farther back toward the Rhine, the defense works were much more superficial, more scattered, and gave the impression of a good deal of improvisation. As far as the 84th was concerned, the decisive phase of the battle of Germany was fought out between the Würm and the Roer.

Just before the Battle

In the attack on the Siegfried Line, some days stand out more than others. The first was November 16, a Thursday. That afternoon, at 12:45 p.m., three of the divisions in the attack, the 30th, 29th, and 2nd Armored, jumped off. For the 84th, however, the most important thing that day was a message. It read: "November 18 is D-Day." We had 48 hours to get set, to make the final preparations, and meanwhile, to watch the progress of the other divisions.

We had a special interest in the 30th Infantry Division because our 335th Infantry and 909th Field Artillery were fighting with it. Besides Euchen and Würselen, the objectives the first day included Mariadorf. Euchen was seized in an hour. Mariadorf was almost as easy. For Würselen, however, the enemy put up a much harder fight. Würselen was the town in which the 30th held about half the houses and the Germans the other half. In fact, one coal mine was divided that way. The Germans were able to hold out in their half of the town all that first day though they found it necessary to

pull out during the night. The second day, November 17, was also a good one for the 30th. Höngen and Broichweiden fell (Map 2).

Farther north, the 29th Infantry Division began its grim march toward Julich on November 16. From the first, resistance was stiff. In front of Bettendorf and between Setterich and Siersdorf, the enemy's fire was fierce. All three towns, however, gave way the next day, November 17. Setterich was a side show for the 29th, which soon handed it over to the 2nd Armored, but we were interested because it was so near our own zone. In the next month, the 29th engaged in some of the bitterest fighting of the war because the Germans were determined to protect the more direct route to Julich, where one of the two main bridgeheads of the whole operation was to be established.

Both the 30th and 29th were too far south of us to affect our own part in the battle directly. It was the 2nd Armored which meant most to us because its progress would partially determine our own. The 2nd Armored was striking out in two directions, toward Gereonsweiler and toward Barmen. The Gereonsweiler drive immediately concerned us. It was on our right flank and the enemy's defenses in the 2nd Armored's zone tied in with his defenses in our zone. Since the 2nd Armored jumped off two days before the 84th, its advance had a special effect on our own position. The Geilenkirchen area was always a salient in our lines, but the farther the 2nd Armored would push to the northeast the more pointed this salient had to become. To clear the way to Linnich, it became absolutely necessary to wipe out the Geilenkirchen salient—our mission.

On November 16, the 2nd Armored's first objectives were the villages of Immendorf, Apweiler, and Puffendorf. Immendorf and Puffendorf were taken that day but Apweiler was harder to crack. The enemy's hold on this tiny collection of farmhouses was so stubborn that it gave us the first important clue to his strategic intentions in the entire sector. Was the German command merely trying to delay us as far as the Roer or was the German command determined to keep us from the Roer altogether by holding on to every possible foot of ground to the bitter end? Apweiler indicated the latter. On the margin of our own zone, it warned us what to expect. Three days of intense fighting were necessary to take Apweiler. Throughout the afternoon of November 16, the 84th Division Artillery (including the 692nd and 753rd FA Battalions) joined in the shelling of Immendorf, Puffendorf, and Apweiler, our first guns to go off in earnest in this sector.

Another thing happened to the 2nd Armored which loomed ahead for us.

On the morning of November 17, the 9th Panzer Division, a superior outfit, was committed. Instead of merely waiting for the 2nd Armored to attack, Brigadier General von Elversfeidt tried to seize the initiative. The two armored forces smashed at each other savagely, attack, counterattack, attack, counterattack. Since the 9th Panzer Division spilled over into our zone, our infantrymen had more than pillboxes, mine fields, and the whole complex of the Siegfried Line to worry about. By the time we entered the battle, the enemy was thoroughly alerted and had time to move important forces into the sector.

The First Shot

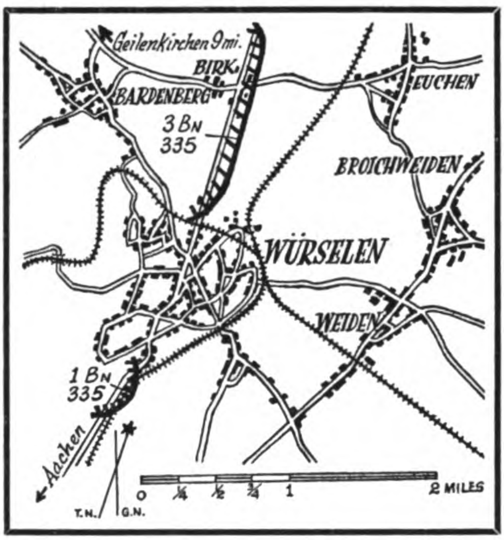
The first units of the 84th to go into action were the 335th Infantry and the 909th Field Artillery. On November 9, they were attached to the 30th Infantry Division in a sector about 6 miles northeast of Aachen. The 335th's 1st Battalion moved into position in the vicinity of Bardenberg and the 3rd Battalion went to Birk (Map 3). The enemy was sitting in Euchen and Würselen, a mile away. The front had been relatively quiet since the fall of Aachen.

The relief of units of the 30th was carried out without incident. Our men went into the old foxholes or dug new ones and carried on where the 30th men had left off. It was good experience because some of these veterans of Normandy, the break-through across France, and the capture of Aachen knew how to build a foxhole with finesse. Our forward foxholes were about 250 yards from the enemy's closest foxholes. On a clear day, we could see enemy soldiers go in and out of pillboxes farther back. Shells came over once in a while.

To the 30th men, that front was a bore but to us it was intensely exciting. It made all the difference in the world that those enemy soldiers we saw for an instant from time to time were real soldiers who meant to kill if they could. Those shells were deadly serious. So were ours. There was one crossroads on which the enemy had full observation. No one merely strolled across it. You did not cross it at all if you could help it, or if you had to cross it, you ran and no one had to urge you. If you were driving a jeep and took the wrong road for as little as 500 yards, you would wind up in the enemy's lines. The days when you could afford to take ten minutes more to get where you were going were gone. In a few days, these dangers

would bore us, too. But, in those first hours, everything was important, ticklish, real war.

For two years, all of us had played at war. We had been soldiers only because the training camps were so different from the life back home. Howze was not Danville, Ind., and Claiborne was not Brooklyn. But in the sense that a good foxhole could really save your life or good staff work a battalion of lives, Howze and Claiborne were something short of war. It is hard for a man who has exposed himself to death to concede that a man



3. THE FIRST ACTION

who has not is a real soldier. That is what makes the man in the line so much prouder of his service.

The first two men of the 84th to go into action were T/Sgt. Milton E. Evans and T/Sgt. Laurence C. Sanders of the 335th's Company C. On the morning of November 9, they went into Würselen on reconnaissance to prepare the way for the remainder of their company, which was relieving the 258th Engineer (C) Battalion. That night, both men met their platoons and guided them into the lines. Sanders' first words were, "I'm a Christian now." He was referring to his baptism of fire. Evans was more matter-of-fact. He warned his men "on keeping distance and control in moving into

this position." At 10:10 p.m., Company C and the 1st Platoon of Company D completed the relief of the engineers. They were the first units of the 84th to go into the line.

The first shot was probably fired three hours later. At 1:10 a.m., November 10, a six-man German patrol approached the foxholes of Company C's 1st Platoon. Pfc. Ernest Radabaugh fired his rifle at the leading German who was about 40 yards away. Radabaugh heard a scream. A moment later, a German grenade landed in front of his hole. The explosion blinded him and his sight was impaired for a week. The patrol was beaten off, however, as the rest of the 1st Platoon joined in. Radabaugh was the division's first battle casualty. Another enemy patrol tried to break through about two hours later but rifle and grenade fire again drove them off.

Our first patrol was sent out by the 335th's 3rd Battalion. At about 9 p.m. on the night of November 12, thirteen men volunteered to find out what the enemy had in front of Birk. They were instructed to reconnoiter the road which led from our lines to the enemy and to check an area in which the Germans had at least three pillboxes.

In the dark, it was easy to get down the road. Ten men peeled off to take a look at the pillboxes, leaving three behind at a rear position. They crawled to the first pillbox and stopped dead. They heard three or four voices inside. Suddenly a German sentry challenged them. He called out a second time. S/Sgt. Burton Matthews and Sgt. John C. Crouse Jr. opened up and killed him. Matthews called on the men inside to surrender. When there was no answer, he threw three hand grenades in the aperture, Crouse one. Matthews also pushed his submachine gun into the opening and sprayed the place.

It was in another patrol action in the same sector two days later that our first man was killed. He was Pfc. Charles H. Harvey of Company I, 335th Infantry. At 3:15 a.m., November 14, a small patrol was coming back, a burst of burp gun fire caught them midway, and Harvey was hit, dying instantly. The first division athletic field in Germany was named Harvey Field.

The First Action

Our first action on a battalion scale came a week later. On November 16, two regiments of the 30th Infantry Division jumped off, the 120th Infantry against Euchen, the 119th Infantry against Würselen. Würselen, in par-


Chapman

ticular, had been annoying the 30th for the past five weeks. Their support came from the 335th's 3rd Battalion at Birk, a tiny village about a mile west of Euchen and approximately the same distance north of Würselen.

First the 3rd Battalion added its fire power to the artillery barrage against Euchen. As soon as the leading elements of the 120th Infantry had reached the edge of Euchen, the 3rd Battalion shifted its fire to a chain of pillboxes between Euchen and Würselen in order to neutralize them. Otherwise, from the pillboxes the enemy might have seriously interfered with the advance into both Euchen and Würselen. Also, since Birk was in between the two towns, there was some danger that the enemy might reply by launching a counterattack in the middle, against Birk. The 3rd Battalion had to guard against this possibility also. These three supporting missions were carried out without difficulty.

The next day, November 17, at 3 a.m. Lt. James J. McCarthy and one squad of Company L went out to investigate the pillboxes between Euchen and Würselen. The first six were empty. At the seventh, they drew a burst of fire and were held up. Two of our men were killed by riflemen in trenches around the pillbox. It was impossible to put artillery fire on the pillbox because our own forces in the village of Broichweiden were in the way. Mortars were brought up to the first pillbox and adjusted on the seventh. Some 57 mm. anti-tank guns also moved up. The guns were brought to bear on the hold-out pillbox, several hits were registered, but the opposition was not eliminated. Our squad, however, was able to withdraw as the pillbox had to cover up. Soon after, apparently, it was abandoned. The next day, the Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon blew up these seven pillboxes and three more. Thirty-five hundred pounds of TNT were required for the job. The pillboxes were large, elaborate forts, their walls about 6 feet thick, concrete and steel mixed.

Ironically, the 335th Infantry was fighting with the 30th Infantry Division at the southern end of the army front while the other units of the 84th Infantry Division were preparing to attack the northern end. For this reason, the 335th was not able to benefit the 84th directly for another ten days. By the end of November 17, as the 30th drove forward as far as Broichweiden, the 29th as far as Setterich, and the 2nd Armored as far as Immendorf, the 84th was ready to jump off on its own.

CHAPTER II

Prummern

On saturday morning, November 18, the bell tolled for us. It was cold, wet, and gray. The roads were muddy and the fields were small swamps. At best, the Geilenkirchen area was not one of Germany's more attractive places. In the fall, after weeks of bombing and big guns, of trucks and tanks that dug into the roads, always sinking deeper and deeper, and the complete absence of any living thing not in uniform, it was grim. If combat has a perfect atmosphere, the land around Geilenkirchen that morning had it. Because the enemy had so much time to prepare, to evacuate all civilians and concentrate on defense to the neglect of everything else, nothing seemed to matter any more except the battle.

The code name for this action was "Operation Clipper." Together with the 43 (British) Division on our left flank, we had as our mission to drive the enemy out of the Geilenkirchen salient. Our 333rd Infantry and 334th Infantry were poised to strike frontally from the south, while the 43 (British) Division was hitting the salient from the west (Map 4 following page 36).

In general, the plan of attack was divided into three phases:

1. At 7 a.m., November 18, the 334th Infantry would jump off on the right flank of the salient to capture the village of Prummern, the high ground between Prummern and Geilenkirchen, and the high ground between Prummern and Beeck.
2. At 12:30 p.m. the same day, the 43 (British) Division was going to jump off to win the ground between the villages of Tripsrath and Bauchem.
3. Finally, at 7 a.m. the next day, November 19, the 333rd Infantry would open the third phase to clear the valley southwest of Geilenkirchen and to take the town itself.

In effect, we were going to squeeze the salient from both sides before launching the assault on Geilenkirchen, the 43 (British) Division on the left, the 334th Infantry on the right. By doing so, we could prevent the enemy from punishing the 333rd Infantry from the flanks when it made the

frontal attack on the town. The enemy's defenses were so thick and the area so small that, at the most optimistic calculation, plenty of opposition had to be expected. We were minimizing these dangers, however, by chewing away at the flanks first, because the dominating ground around Geilenkirchen was on the flanks.

"The advance down the Würm River valley was a most difficult operation for new troops inasmuch as the entire valley was covered by the Siegfried defenses," General Bolling said at the time. "That it was the most likely avenue of approach to the main Siegfried Line was well known to the enemy when he established these defenses. It was decided, therefore, to envelop the likely avenue of approach and take the high ground that dominated the Würm Valley."

In order to see the continuity of the action, it is best to follow the attack on Prummern to its conclusion before going into the attack on Geilenkirchen. But it should be remembered that, after the first day, both actions went on simultaneously and tied into each other. The attack was just as mutually supporting as the defense. By the time the 84th entered the battle, the Siegfried Line was swaying at a half-dozen points, and north of Aachen the front for 15 miles was blazing.

D-minus-1

The day before our D-Day, November 17, was spent in Palenberg by the 334th Infantry. The most important job was "briefing" the men. In small groups, the battalions were told how they fitted into the general plan, what their special missions were; where, why, and how they were going to accomplish them; what opposition they could expect and where. Weapons were never cleaned before, and probably never after, as scrupulously as they were that day. Every man had a thousand things to do—it takes a little experience to get down to the bare necessities.

There was one important detail the day before. It was known that the enemy had mined the approaches to the railroad between Geilenkirchen and Immendorf—it turned out to be an anti-tank mine belt 25 yards wide. Behind the mine field, underneath the railroad bank, were dugouts. This was the first German defense line in the sector. A patrol from the 334th had found two gaps in the mine fields north of Breil and both of them were mined by our own men to prevent the enemy from using them. At midnight, November 17, the mines in these gaps were removed, but the margin

of safety was not big enough for our tanks and troops. A British unit, Drewforce, including two troops of "Flails" and an "artificial moonlight" troop, went out at 6 a.m. on November 18, one hour before the jump-off, to widen the gaps. Four giant searchlights threw a light haze over the area. (The 84th was the first American unit to use artificial moonlight, and it was successfully employed throughout the campaign in the Siegfried Line.) The heavy, clanking chains of the "Flails," five to each gap, detonated the mines. Two platoons of infantry supported the "Flails." Engineers checked. Sherman tanks stood guard. The whole mine-removing operation was covered by the 84th Division Artillery. The way was clear.

As for the 334th, its 1st Battalion on the right was sent to take Prummern, its 2nd Battalion on the left to take the high ground between Geilenkirchen and Prummern, while the 3rd Battalion was held in reserve. A British tank unit, the Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry Regiment, veterans of Africa and Normandy, was attached to the 334th. Companies B and C of the 309th Engineers (C) Battalion were also added. Direct artillery support was provided by the 326th FA Battalion. In short, this was planned as a co-ordinated attack by infantry, armor, engineers, and artillery.

In the dark of Saturday morning, at 4 o'clock, the 334th's 1st Battalion moved out of Palenberg to the tiny village of Hoverhof. There the final formation for the attack was organized. At 6, the battalion went forward again, this time to the village of Breil. At the same time, the "Flails" were widening the gaps. North of Breil, the battalion was supposed to pass through one of the gaps, followed by the tanks. The 326th and 692nd FA Battalions furnished direct support for the infantry. Three artillery observers for the 326th rode in the tanks to give the Sherwood Rangers direct support.

On a smaller scale, the battalion staff had to make the same sort of plan that the army, the corps, and the division had made. The chief problem after the mine field was nine pillboxes between Immendorf and Prummern, protecting the southern approaches to Prummern. These pillboxes were the battalion's immediate objectives. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lloyd H. Gomes, explained his line of reasoning:

"I divided these obstacles into two localities, one containing six pillboxes, the other three. Since the gaps created in the mine field would be narrow, from the viewpoint of sending deploying infantry through them, I decided that the battalion would advance in a column of companies, Company A to lead, followed by Company B and Company C in that order."

The first group of six pillboxes was emplaced just north of Immendorf.

The town had been taken by the 2nd Armored two days earlier but the pillboxes had not. This group was designated as "X." The other three pillboxes were about 600 yards farther north, almost midway between Immendorf and Prummern. This group was called "Y." Colonel Gomes added:

"The plan was to have Company A go through the gap and strike hard for X, infiltrating through the fortifications and smothering the pillboxes by fire. To assist Company A, we had four tanks, four tank destroyers, one heavy machine gun platoon with all the fire support of the mortar platoon and artillery on call. Company B was to jump off after Company A, initially prepared to reinforce Company A's fire and then move on to its objective Y. Company B was to have one platoon of tanks and one platoon of heavy machine guns with artillery on call."

There was one more thought in the plan. Company C was saved for the direct assault on Prummern, once the pillboxes were taken. Company B, which had to dispose of fewer pillboxes, also was going to participate in the attack. It was anticipated, however, that Company A would need time to reorganize after its fling at the group of six. In the second phase, then, Company A would replace Company C as the Ist Battalion's reserve.

D-Day

Finally, it was 5 minutes to 7, November 18. Our artillery opened for five minutes to prepare the way for the tanks and doughboys, to make the ground ahead so hot that the enemy would have to stay in his hole as our infantry jumped off. A soldier who is afraid to stick his head out of his hole means one weapon less to worry about, and it is the soldier at the weapon, not merely the soldier, that counts. That is what an artillery "preparation" can do for an infantryman who has to expose himself all the way to those enemy holes.

It was 7, H-Hour. The infantry was ready to go through the gaps but the tanks were not. They were slowed up by mud and all the tanks had to pass through the gap on the right. The infantry did not wait and went off alone at exactly 7.

Company A got as far as the orchards on the eastern edge of Breil. There the men ran into fire for the first time. Eighty-eights and mortars began to pile in. The first two platoons escaped the worst of it and hit out for the railroad. The remainder of the company was held up for a while in the

orchard. At the trenches along the railroad embankment, they ran into live German soldiers for the first time. In some spots, there was hand-to-hand fighting—one of the rare cases. Most Germans in those trenches were not too determined to die. But surprise was gone. The enemy's shelling of the entire area was intense. From the trenches, 1000 yards had to be crossed to get to the pillboxes. Instinctively, a new man seeks protection in the ground, any ground. A major effort of will, or somebody else's will, is necessary to get him out of a hole. The battalion commander went down to the platoons and one started moving after another.

Meanwhile, Company B was also moving through Breil in the orchard on the western edge of the village. The 1st Platoon, in the lead, went through the orchard and worked its way eastward along the railroad track, then struck out cross-country toward the three pillboxes. The other platoons were held up by heavy artillery fire at the railroad track. The 1st Platoon was out "in the breeze."

These first pillboxes were not as hard to handle as we had expected. Company A could see its set of six from the captured trenches. The tanks and Company D's machine guns began to pepper the forts. When fire is accurate and continuous, the Germans inside have to close up all the openings, to "button up." As soon as a box closes up, the men inside are virtually blind. It is possible to creep up to one and even to jump on top of it. The break came when some men dropped smoke grenades into a ventilator from the roof of a pillbox. No fewer than 45 men came out of one pillbox. Then Company A dug in slightly southwest of Prummern and spent the rest of the day and night there. Once the set of six pillboxes was taken, it was given a rest and Company C was sent in.

The set of three pillboxes farther north had to be taken by the 1st Platoon of Company B because the other platoons could not get beyond the artillery barrage at the railroad track. Nevertheless, the 1st Platoon had a comparatively easy time of it. Before launching the attack on the pillboxes, the 1st had connected up with two British tanks. Tanks and doughboys moved up together. About 300 yards from the pillboxes, they stopped. The tanks opened up. The doughboys went ahead alone slowly. Most of the Germans were waiting in trenches in front of the pillboxes, not in the pillboxes themselves. This particular trench system was very elaborate, planned to enable the enemy to get back all the way to Prummern without exposing himself to normal observation. But he never got the chance to carry out the plan. As soon as the tanks let go, the enemy in the trenches began to head

for the pillboxes. A few, more frightened or more daring, tried to make for Prummern. By this time, our doughboys were too close and flight was suicide. Apparently none of the Germans tried to fire from the pillboxes themselves. The three were occupied in 45 minutes. It was just short of 9 in the morning.

Our trouble with pillboxes in the Prummern area was not over by any means. On the whole, these were some of the easiest and we were glad they were, otherwise we might have spent too much of our energies before we could tackle the village itself. It is interesting to note that a platoon did the work of a company, as so many times a company has to do the work of a battalion.

Paradoxically, it is often safer to go out in the lead than to follow up, especially when the enemy's most effective answer is his artillery and mortars. In this case, a typical example, the leading platoon had bounded off and had almost come to grips with the enemy before the attack was spotted. In due time, the enemy woke up and fired back but the platoon had advanced too far to get this fire. Instead, the platoons a few hundred yards to the rear received most of it. Sometimes a whole company will slip through but the rest of the battalion will be caught in a deadly barrage. To lag back in an attack may be the surest way of never getting back.

Then the few who have slipped through must decide the issue of victory or defeat. If they feel deserted, they may halt or hesitate, or even try to go back. Any one of these three reactions may be fatal, not only to the attack but also to the men who have been lucky so far. They have slipped through only because they have caught the enemy off balance, unprepared, and they must at all costs keep him that way. After all, he cannot know how many have slipped through or who was held up and where. In the face of a slashing attack, he is not in a position to consider that it was really supposed to come off with a company. All he knows for certain is that he can almost hear some of us breathing. All he knows is that those grandiose defenses which had promised him so much have failed him, and it is his skin next.

If the platoon had tried to get back, in all probability it would merely have fallen into the barrage that held up the other platoons. If it had halted and hesitated, it would have given the enemy time to size up the situation and save it. It took on the job of the company by itself and had the Germans stumbling out of their holes in a matter of moments. It is typical of modern warfare that the leading elements do a very large share of all the fighting.

Prummern Falls

After 9 o'clock of that murky morning on November 18, the 1st Platoon of Company B was out alone between the captured pillboxes and the village of Prummern. The rest of the 1st Battalion was a good 1000 yards behind. The platoon was dug in, the men could see the first houses from the tops of their holes. It was not too uncomfortable. The artillery was heavy but all of it was flying overhead. It was too risky to assault the village all by themselves so there was nothing to do but wait until the others had negotiated those long 1000 yards. About 10 o'clock, six more British tanks showed up but did not stay. Another hour passed. Finally, at noon, some more figures appeared at the pillboxes, which were now empty, then more and more. They were the rest of Company B and Company C.

The battalion commander was determined not to lose any more time. The attack against Prummern itself jumped off at 12:30, Company B on the right, Company C on the left, Company A in reserve. A ten-minute artillery preparation led off. The ground was flat. No concealment was possible. From the southwestern edge of Prummern some machine gun and sniper fire came their way from scattered trenches and foxholes, but the opposition was not serious. The two companies stopped in their drive to take the village only long enough to clean out the trenches and wave prisoners to the rear.

Once in the town, all enemy mortar and artillery fire ceased. Prisoners stumbled out of their houses and cellars. A grenade went into every house to help the others make up their minds. An hour and a half later, Companies B and C were through Prummern, though mopping up was going to be a much longer job. They dug in in orchards in the outskirts, Company B on the western edge, Company C in the north, and Company A on the southwest. By dusk, the three companies were settled around the western half of the village but an important enemy strong point was holding out in the northeast on some difficult high ground.

Meanwhile, the 334th's 2nd Battalion was driving another wedge into the Geilenkirchen salient. While the 1st Battalion had been striking directly at Prummern, the 2nd Battalion was moving up on the left between Prummern and Geilenkirchen to win a stretch of high ground northeast of Geilenkirchen. Its story was much the same. Company E slipped through the gap in the mine field at 7 o'clock that morning, November 18, but Company G, which followed, received the same fire which held up most of Company B.

As a result, it took some time for Company G to catch up. The mud was too much for the tanks so Company E went forward for a time alone.

For about an hour and a half, Company E advanced toward its objective, some high ground that would cut the road between Geilenkirchen and Immendorf. Enemy artillery and small arms fire worried them all the way but, fortunately, it was not very accurate. The hill was taken before 9 o'clock. Then Company F took over. It was sent out to take some more high ground northeast of Geilenkirchen. The second hill was taken by 3:10 that afternoon. At dusk, the battalion tried to push forward again, this time to a hill east of Suggerath. A network of trenches and pillboxes blocked the way. In the dark, under increasingly heavy and accurate fire, for by that time the entire sector was blazing, the effort had to be abandoned. Nevertheless, the dominating ground east of Geilenkirchen, the main objective, was wrested from the enemy. The battalion dug in for the night. It was a stormy, sleepless night because the foxholes were out in the open and the German guns were sleepless also. By that time, they knew where to find us.

The first phase of the battle of Prummern was over. That evening we had Prummern, or most of it, and the ground on the west between Prummern and Geilenkirchen was also ours. The enemy was still in Geilenkirchen itself—the salient was now a thin sliver—and the eastern side of Prummern was much less satisfactory than the western side. In effect, by dusk, we had driven a salient into the enemy's salient. If he was dangerously exposed, neither were we completely covered. In such a situation the hours of the night are long and tense. Has the enemy decided to pull back and save us more trouble? Has he decided to strike back and make us fight twice as hard to hold the ground?

We did not have to wait long to find out.

The Enemy Can Attack, Too

It is time to look at the other side of the coin. What was the battle of Prummern like for the enemy? Obviously it is not possible to tell the German story in any detail, but even the general outline may be revealing and help to round out the picture.

When we attacked on November 18, Prummern itself was held by elements of the 343rd Infantry Regiment of the 183rd Volksgrenadier Division. This division had been so badly punished in Russia that it had to be withdrawn to reorganize. The 183rd arrived in the west on September 18, 1944,

exactly two months before our attack. It was committed early in October in the battle of Aachen but, again, it suffered so heavily that it had to be pulled out. In the relative lull of October 15-30, its casualties were replaced partially, its equipment patched up, its staff shaken up. At the beginning of November, it was thrown in to hold the Geilenkirchen sector, the 1st Company of the 343rd Infantry Regiment in Geilenkirchen, the 2nd Company in Prummern.

In Prummern, these volksgrenadiers did not show up very well. That first day they were pushed around without too much difficulty. Most of our trouble came from the German artillery farther back, not from the German infantry. But it should be remembered that, by the time we attacked on November 18, the general assault on the Siegfried Line was 48 hours old. It was perfectly clear to the German command that a major offensive was under way all along the front. Already on November 17, the 9th Panzer Division had been committed against our 2nd Armored Division in the sector next to ours. In this offensive, the sectors were so narrow that it was easy to spill over from one to the other. As a result, when the 84th began to cut through the 183rd, the enemy had the 9th Panzer on the spot to take a crack at us.

The mission of the 183rd Volksgrenadiers apparently was to hold, to hold if necessary to the last man, to keep us out of those painfully prepared positions. The 183rd did not hold and certainly not to the last man. The fact that the German command decided to throw in the 9th Panzer in a desperate effort to win back every possible foot of ground, to counterattack as often as we attacked, was one of the key elements in the whole situation. It meant that we had to fight to hold our gains. In the Siegfried Line, the enemy was not merely trying to delay us; he was trying to keep us out altogether. He was not fighting economically; he was investing as much as he had.

It was 10 o'clock that night, November 18. The 334th's 1st Battalion was dug in on the western side of Prummern. Another hill, this one almost midway between Prummern and Beeck, had to be taken before the night was over. Company B of the 1st Battalion and Company F of the 2nd Battalion were chosen for the job. A patrol was sent out to reconnoiter, to find a route to the new objective.

The patrol came back at about 2 in the morning. It brought back important news, more important than a route. Six enemy tanks were just north of Prummern and moving into the town. A half hour later, at 2:30, the blow

fell. From Beeck, from Lindern and farther back, German artillery began to pour steel into the village. The tanks raked the streets. The place was bedlam. The effect was weird, shells exploding, houses burning, flashes streaking. The barrage lasted a half hour. Then the tanks moved in.

It was a well-conceived, determined, large-scale counterattack by two companies of the 10th Panzer Grenadier Regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the 33rd Tank Regiment, units of the 9th Panzer Division. All that night, Prummern was no-man's-land. From the northern end the enemy's tanks made the whole village unhealthy.

Lt. Carl C. Palm, 1st Platoon of the 334th Infantry's Anti-Tank Company, had to spend the night in town and his experiences were typical. After two of his guns were placed, his third brought him to the attention of one German tank. Palm spent most of the night in a haystack across the street from the enemy's command post. He paid the Germans back by taking pot shots at anyone who left the CP, carefully timing his rounds with the enemy's artillery bursts so that his shots could not be picked up. He could not tell whether he was able to hit anyone but was more interested in the fact that he lived through the night in that haysack without anyone hitting him.

The next afternoon, November 19, Palm decided to make a getaway. The village was suspiciously quiet but he did not know why. He sneaked out the back way of his barn into the yard and then made his way to another barn. A German suddenly confronted him. Palm's gun went off automatically. "He ran into my gun," Palm said. He left the dead German and made a dash for a stable. To his chagrin, he found another German inside. He was afraid to shoot this one because he decided that he had made too much noise already. It struck him that the enemy might be all over the place and that his old hayloft might be the safest place after all. He took his live German with him to his hideout. The two made a strange pair for an hour, the captor afraid that he might be captured momentarily. To Palm's surprise, Captain Harry M. Deck, his company commander, came walking down the street. He was looking for Palm's platoon. In the end, they found half the platoon.

Palm did not know it at the time but the two Germans that he ran into while he was trying to make his own getaway were trying to hide for the same reason that Palm had crept into the hayloft the night before. The enemy force had gone into the village that night but had been forced to pull out in the daytime. Those two were refugees. As far as Palm was concerned, the important thing was that, after a night of terror, Prummern was

again relatively safe on the afternoon of November 19, safe enough to walk in the streets, even if you were apt to bump into miscellaneous Germans in almost any cellar, stable, or barn. But why it was relatively safe the next day is part of a larger story which had to be pieced together.

Prummern Falls Again

As a matter of course, every commander who has had any training or experience tries to hold something back in reserve when he engages the enemy. A company commander holds back a platoon, a battalion commander a company, a regimental commander a battalion, and so on. That reserve is his second punch. The first one may hurt the enemy and the second one may knock him out. But the reserve is also his insurance policy. The first one may have hurt the enemy only enough to bring on a full-fledged counterattack, to force the enemy to trade blows. Since the enemy is apt to throw in his fresh troops to make the counterattack, it is very sensible to have some fresh ones to meet it.

But there is more to it than that. Every commander may know enough to keep a reserve force at hand for an opportunity or an emergency, but there is nothing in the books to tell him exactly when to use it. If he uses up his reserve too soon, the enemy's counterattack may catch him by surprise anyway. If he waits too long, the battle may be decided before he makes up his mind. The problem of throwing in his reserves at the right time is one of the most delicate and decisive a commander can face. As long as he holds something back, he can feel a certain sense of security that he can make an extra effort if he has to. But once he has flung everything he has into the battle he has his back against the wall. It is his last throw of the dice. Psychologically, that is an embarrassing moment for any commander.

The battle of Prummern was a lesson in reserves. When it opened on the morning of November 18, two battalions were used, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 334th Infantry. By that night, when the Germans counterattacked in force, both of them were quite exhausted. Behind the 1st Battalion, however, the 3rd Battalion was following at a distance of about 1500 yards. The 3rd Battalion spent the night around the railroad tracks west of Immendorf. The next day it was still relatively fresh. It was also near enough to Prummern to help out without delay. On the morning of November 19, the 3rd Battalion was thrown in.

The northeast corner of Prummern was the town's hot spot. The Germans knew how to take advantage of favorable terrain, how to site their guns to do the most damage, and Prummern was no exception. Just outside the northeastern edge of the village was some high ground. In drawing up our own plans, we called it "Mahogany Hill," though as hills went, it was not impressive enough to have a name of its own. Also at that corner of Prummern, there was a very useful intersection which controlled the town's two best roads. On the hill, the enemy put three pillboxes. The intersection was protected by two pillboxes, one in front, one behind. As long as the enemy held on to the northeast corner, the job was only half done.

At 11 o'clock, the 3rd Battalion was sent out to take Mahogany Hill. Company I led. The company entered Prummern and was making its way through the southern quarter of the village when the second battle of Prummern broke out. A German company was barring the way. For a half hour, the fight was fierce. Both sides suffered heavily. Everyone was so close that hand-to-hand and bayonet fighting was necessary. At the end of that half hour, Company I dug in on the eastern side of Prummern about 400 yards from Mahogany Hill. Company K was following and dug in behind.

That afternoon, November 19, Sherwood Ranger tanks went into Prummern, shot up at least two German tanks, and controlled the village, except for the northeast corner which was still very lively all that day.

The attack on the intersection was left for November 20. Company I and Company K started out at 8 o'clock in the morning but were held up 15 minutes later by heavy machine gun fire. They called for artillery and smoke on the pillboxes, started forward again, advanced into the valley in front of Mahogany Hill, moved about 300 yards and stopped. At 3 o'clock that afternoon, they tried again but the intersection frustrated them. At 4:30, Company L was committed, tried to make a flanking movement on the hill from the right, got halfway up Mahogany Hill, went as far as 100 yards from the first pillbox, received a concentrated dose of machine gun fire which just raked the ground, and dug in for the day. In effect, our infantry was closing in on all the German strong points but another blow was necessary to knock them out.

This was one time the tanks came in handy, especially some of the models the British were using. As dusk was settling, about 5:30, two Crocodiles or flame-throwing tanks shuffled up toward the crossroads. About 75 yards from the first pillbox, they began to spit out their incredible fire. The spurt

of flame struck the target. The walls of the pillbox seemed to burn like wood. It was a matter of moments. Then the second crackled. The men who were lucky enough to see the spectacle momentarily forgot the mud and the danger and Mahogany Hill. It was one of those terrible and beautiful sights which the machines of war create so often almost in spite of themselves, which seem all the more unreal against the ugly reality of war. Once the Crocodiles had worked them over, those pillboxes were black, shrunken coffins. Inside, as soon as the flames penetrated, the heat became inhuman. By dusk, the crossroads was safe. Only Mahogany Hill held out. Since it was outside Prummern, the village was finally ours by November 20. Two days later, Mahogany Hill also fell, curiously to Company L alone, because the other two companies had gone forward meanwhile to attack Beeck. Having held out for four days, the enemy in the pillboxes on the hill evidently felt safe and was caught off guard.

Life around Prummern

Prummern was our first objective. We were learning.

We learned that it was not necessary to use a whole company to take a pillbox. As few as five or six men, if properly trained and guided, can do the job. A single BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) can close up a pillbox. A single bazooka can blow in the embrasure. To take one of the pillboxes on Mahogany Hill, Company L sent out two bazookas, two BAR's, and two men with 10-pound pole charges. To send out more men is simply to expose more men. To use smaller teams means that more pillboxes can be engaged at the same time so that every pillbox in the vicinity has too much to worry about to help out another.

We were learning. As important as anything else, our men were learning how to live in mud, in soaking foxholes, under artillery fire, under constant strain. In war, there are two kinds of battles and many times it is hard to know which is worse. There is the battle to kill the enemy and there is the battle with yourself to live. The one is against people, the other against mud or ice or rain or vermin or boredom or homesickness or imaginary terrors. In Germany in November, it was mud. Now and then we fought the enemy, for a few hours or a few days. The mud we fought always, every miserable minute. The mud was Germany

It is amazing what a little mud in the wrong place can do. It will make your rifle a worthless piece of junk. It will jam it just when you need it most.

It will ooze through your shoes and through your socks and eat away your feet. It will make your foxhole a slimy, slippery, smelly jail. It will creep into your hair, your food, your teeth, your clothes, and sometimes your mind. The enemy's best ally in the Siegfried Line was trench foot. There is one consolation. If you get enough mud, you are almost sure to get used to it. Also, fortunately, some things are worse than mud. The first time you have to spend the night in a foxhole three-quarters full of water, you will feel elated the next time you only have mud to worry about. You will also think to yourself what a wonderful war it would be if only you could hit some fine, solid ground and not mud all the time. Thoughts like that make life bearable in battle.

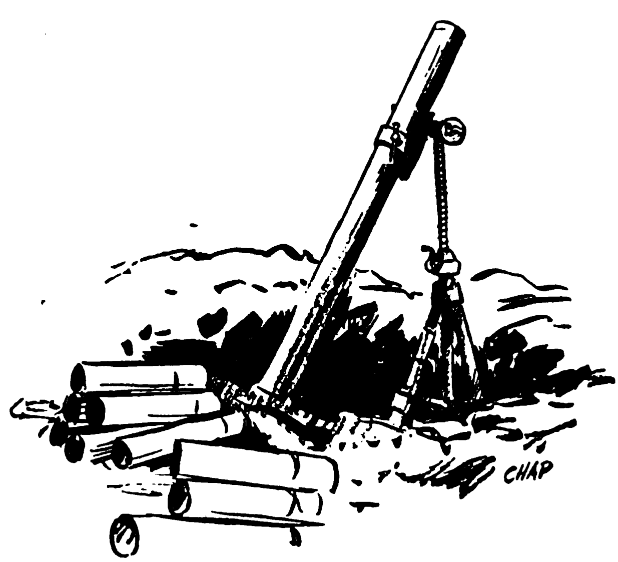
As Prummern showed, the shooting was by no means one way. The Germans did plenty of shooting themselves. A wise man learns to hit the ground in no time. It is something else to hit the mud. It is something else to sink into 4 or 5 inches of mud, swampy, filthy mud, every time you have to duck. It is also something else to have to get up out of that stuff and sometimes drop down and get up again and again. The artillerymen had their mud too. The 95 pounds of a 155 mm. shell can drag a man down deeper and deeper. The men of the 327th FA found that out.

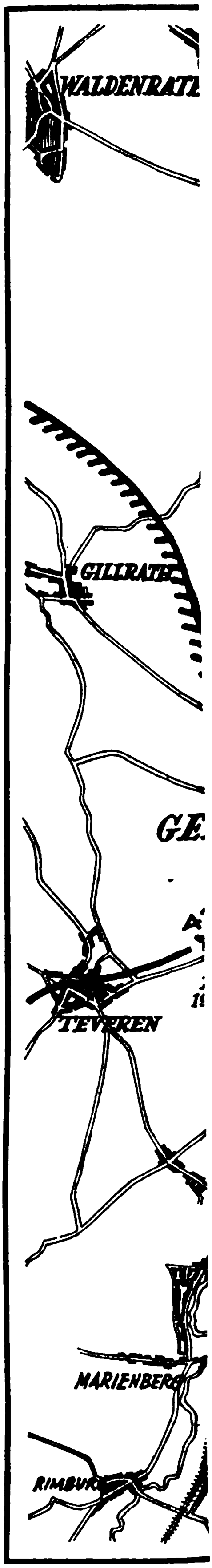
The wire men also had their mud. If the wire is on the ground, the stuff works its way in and shorts it or skidding cars have a way of taking wire for a ride. The alternative, putting the wire overhead, where bullets and shell fragments like to congregate, is not much better. And yet, the work of the 84th Signal Company and the Communications Platoons was remarkably effective. The former's responsibility was back of the regiments. It always managed to keep two lines in to each regiment, as well as lateral lines to the artillery. The commanding general always had a direct line to the regiments which was held in the clear for him.

We learned fast. The 334th's 3rd Battalion, for example, organized carrying parties from the rear to bring socks, water, food, and clean rifles to the foxholes at night. The main thing was socks. They were changed every night. The rifle problem was met by taking them from the cooks and service company men and giving them to the men in the front lines. The carrying parties took back the rifles jammed with mud and the men at battalion headquarters spent the next day cleaning them. The 784th Ordnance Company also provided clean weapons on an exchange basis in addition to its normal duties. The 84th Quartermaster Company supplied clean socks for the entire division.

Prummern was tough, especially tough because it was the first experience

in combat. It would be unjust to the men who fought there to pretend that it was pretty and easy. There were no easy fights in the Siegfried Line for another month. We paid for every yard, but the important thing was that we handed out more punishment than we took. If it was not pretty for us, it was much worse for them.




WALDENRATH
GILLRATH
TEVEREN
MARIENBERG

CHAPTER III

Geilenkirchen

A BATTLE may be like a three-ring, a five-ring, or even a ten-ring circus and it may be necessary to keep a corner of the eye on all of them at once to see the whole thing. It was that way at Prummern and Geilenkirchen. Prummern was attacked on November 18 and for 24 hours it was the only show. Geilenkirchen was attacked on November 19 before the story of Prummern was finished completely. On the second day of this battle, then, two big performances were going on at the same time and there were a number of little shows in each one. Although it is necessary to concentrate on one sector at a time in order to avoid too much confusion, what was happening simultaneously in other sectors should be kept in mind.

On the morning of November 19, four infantry battalions were fighting in the Geilenkirchen salient. The 334th's 1st Battalion, which had fought its way into Prummern the day before, was dug in around the western side of the town. The 334th's 3rd Battalion was moving into Prummern. The 334th's 2nd Battalion was dug in between Prummern and Suggerath. Thus all three battalions of the 334th Infantry were engaged. Geilenkirchen itself was assigned to the 1st Battalion, 333rd Infantry, which moved out on D-plus-1. In effect, on November 19, while the German counterattack was broken in Prummern, the attack on Geilenkirchen was launched.

By cleaning up the Prummern area first, we were able to put the German forces in Geilenkirchen in a most untenable position. On the morning of November 19, the German salient extended from the tip of Suggerath to the bottom of Geilenkirchen, a distance of about 4000 yards (Map 4). But we had squeezed the salient so hard by moving up into the Prummern area that it was only about 1000 yards wide. The German forces in Geilenkirchen were caught in a narrow sack and their escape routes at some points were only about 500 yards wide. An important part of the battle of Geilenkirchen was fought, therefore, in Prummern. If Prummern was relatively hard to take and Geilenkirchen was relatively easy, this was the reason. Actually,

the original salient was small enough to enable the Germans to defend it as a whole and every action in it was fundamentally a fragment of one large action.

Down the Würm

The town of Geilenkirchen is cut in half by the Würm River. The river served as a company boundary in the attack (see the third illustration following page 68). Company A of the 1st Battalion, 333rd Infantry, jumped off on the left side of the Würm, Company B on the right side, and Company C moved up behind Company B. The 325th FA Battalion provided direct support. Geilenkirchen itself was held by the 1st Battalion, 343rd Infantry, 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, the same outfit that was kicked out of Prummern in our first attack.

The Würm made contact between the two companies difficult. As soon as the radios went dead, communication between the two companies was lost. When plans for an attack are made, the ground is divided carefully among the various units in the attack, and one unit is supposed to rub shoulders with the next one. In reality, nothing is harder to maintain in combat than contact. It is a lucky day when radios are working, when messengers go where they are supposed to go, and come back, or when you can see anything more than some more mud, a patch of trees, or another hill wherever you turn. Some radios work for 15 minutes and pass out mysteriously, messengers take a long time when they make it—which is not often—and everyone is too busy to worry about where everyone else is.

So it is best to tell the stories of Company A and Company B as the men had to live them. The radios were temperamental, as usual, messengers were not practicable, and both companies were on their own most of the time.

Company B on the right of the Würm traveled fast. They jumped off at 7 a.m., November 19. They ran into their first live enemy soldiers about 500 yards southeast of Geilenkirchen, six Germans who walked out of a trench and gave themselves up without firing a shot. They suffered their first casualties in a woods outside the town, from wooden "Schu" mines, which our detectors could not pick up. After that, it was straight going for a while.

The center of Geilenkirchen was reached about 9 o'clock. All contact with Company A was cut, but the impression was that Company A was running into much more trouble. Not much effort was made to take prisoners in

Geilenkirchen, though they came out willingly in batches. The chief idea was to get through the town as quickly as possible.

Company B continued to race through its half of Geilenkirchen, cleared the town, and drove on toward the next village, Suggerath, about a mile away. Communications were still haphazard. The radios seemed to work ten minutes out of every hour. It was clear that Company B was still going faster than Company A because the opposition was lighter. As long as its advance was comparatively easy, however, Company B pushed on. The main route was one side or the other of the railroad track.

The first real enemy fire, mortars, came about 2:30 in the afternoon between Geilenkirchen and Suggerath. The Germans had zeroed in on the railroad. Company B spread out but did not stop moving, getting as far as the southern edge of Suggerath by 3 o'clock. There small arms and mortar fire began to come in heavily. The leading platoon was caught in it. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Thomas W. Woodyard Jr., who was up front with Company B, decided it had enough temporarily. He called up the British tanks, moved Company C through Company B, and told them to get set to go through Suggerath together.

Just before 4 o'clock, Company C and the tanks attacked Suggerath. The village was burning. Snipers were popping all around. The tanks covered the advance elements but the rest of the company charged into cross fire from Germans left behind. As a result, it was about 5 o'clock before Suggerath was cleared fully. Meanwhile, Company B was reorganized and helped to clean out the village. The resistance in Suggerath was much tougher than it had been in Geilenkirchen as far as Companies B and C were concerned.

By dusk, then, both Geilenkirchen and Suggerath were captured, though a good deal of mopping up remained. German soldiers were stumbling out of holes and cellars and barns in Geilenkirchen for the next two days. The 1st Battalion's work that day, November 19, was not yet done. The high ground between Suggerath and Müllendorf was particularly important. From it, the enemy would have been able to mount the same sort of counterattack that gave us so much trouble in Prummern. On the other hand, if we sat on the hill, the Germans might never get started. The next objective was that high ground outside of Suggerath.

Company C pushed on but had to stop short because it was too dark to proceed properly. Colonel Woodyard decided that he had to see what the ground was like. It was too dangerous to stop at the edge of Suggerath if the enemy was determined to hit back. He took six men along. One rifle-

man soon separated from them in the dark and five were left. They covered about 600 yards safely and were just about ready to go up the hill. One man told what happened:

"We were ambushed. They jumped us. There were six or seven Jerries on both sides of us. There was a machine gun ahead of us. We couldn't use the radio. We got all tied up in some telephone wires and couldn't swing ourselves free. One Jerry stood right up on the tracks with a Tommy gun. He was probably lying between the tracks. He hit one man in the throat. Some of our boys fired back and I think got a couple of them."

He went on: "This quieted them down. We thought maybe they were pulling back. A group from Company C was following about 75 yards behind but they were pretty slow. Then some Jerry threw a grenade and hit Colonel Woodyard in the left arm. The blood was spurting. He rolled over still tangled up in the wire. We couldn't go any farther. The grenade got him just when we had started up the ridge to look it over. He was able to crawl back to Company C to send it forward."

A platoon of Company C came up to that very position and then the rest of the company followed. The hill was ours, the end of a long, hard day. The 333rd's 3rd Battalion sent two companies into Suggerath to help mop it up. The Geilenkirchen salient had vanished by the night of November 19.

The Mystery of Company A

All this was going on in the sector of the 333rd's Company B and Company C on the right side of the Würm, but there was only the vaguest notion of the progress on the left side in Company A's sector. By pushing on despite the obscurity, Company B had cleared its part of Geilenkirchen in a hurry and Company C had slipped through the next town of Suggerath, so strongly held by the enemy that it might have held us up for some time if the Germans had been able to get set. Nevertheless, to recapture the atmosphere, it is necessary to remember that the mystery of Company A was very disturbing because it might have meant that the left flank was wide open. The alternatives were to wait until the mystery was cleared up, in which case the whole attack would have bogged down, or to take advantage of the softer defenses on the right flank, in which case a certain amount of risk was inevitable. The latter was chosen.

What was happening to Company A? The left side of the Würm was much more heavily fortified than the right side. Before getting to the first

houses in Geilenkirchen, Company A had to cross a gravel pit, then a dense mine field about 30 yards wide covered by entrenchments and an elaborate system of wire barriers, then a sports plaza—German infantry liked to hold out in sports plazas—and finally a series of high walls separating a group of orchards. The necessary preparations were made, but at best the attack promised to be much harder on the left flank than the right flank. On the night of November 18-19, the regimental mine platoon cleared two paths through the mine field and taped them off. Every squad had two ropes and a grappling hook to scale the walls.

The 1st Platoon jumped off. No trouble was encountered in the gravel pit. An embankment up the gravel pit, more than 50 feet high, was a hard climb but much less dangerous than anticipated because the sports plaza, from which the enemy was expected to fire, was still strangely quiet. Between the gravel pit and the sports plaza was the mine field. Two platoons, the 1st and 4th, moved through the white tape on the left, the other two platoons, the 2nd and 3rd, on the right. That mine field had them worried and they were glad to get out of it. The sports plaza was also uneventful.

By turning east from the sports plaza, Company A came to the first houses. As a glance at Map 4 shows, Company A had much more of Geilenkirchen to cover than Company B because the lower half of the town is mainly on the left side of the Würm. By moving along the railroad track on the right side, Company B was able to proceed in the open almost to the center of the town whereas Company A had to engage in house-to-house fighting just beyond the sports plaza. As for Company A, the 1st Platoon led the way on the left side of the main street through the town, the 3rd Platoon on the right side.

The first shots were fired at Germans who wanted to surrender but did not have the time to arrange it properly. The problem of surrender in the midst of battle is one of the most fascinating and difficult in the art of war. In this case a German soldier came out on the veranda of a house and waved a white cloth or handkerchief. Three Company A men peeked out of their trenches and motioned to him to surrender. Another German in the same house on the lower floor opened up on our men with a burp gun. The house was riddled. The man who wanted to surrender never had the opportunity. This little episode started the battle of Geilenkirchen for Company A. It was almost 9 a.m. Immediately after, German mortars began to come down in force in the vicinity of the first house. It was an hour later before we were able to get to the second one. There were enemy nests in every house; every building was tunneled from one cellar to another by holes blown in the

cellar walls, permitting easy passage without going into the street; enemy mortars were especially effective. The company was held up for about an hour.

The break came at 10 o'clock. A British tank lieutenant came up to one of our platoon leaders and coolly asked how he "could help us out." The tanker said: "Give me a definite target and an order and we'll go after it." Every house was a target. Two Sherwood Ranger tanks drove up, swung into the street, and began to blow away at everything in sight. When the tanks moved down the street, Germans left or gave up. Five officers and 20 men surrendered in one batch of dugouts in an orchard. By 1 p.m., half the town was cleared, four hours after Company B had reached the same point in its sector.

Again the tanks helped out enormously. There was a pillbox at a key crossroads in the upper half of Geilenkirchen. A tank pulled up to the pillbox, stuck the muzzle of its gun into the aperture, and let go. No one in that pillbox was ever heard from again. The town was cleared by 2:30. A road ran out of town toward Suggerath just west of the Würm and parallel to it. Company A used that road, the tanks immediately behind the riflemen. The 43 (British) Division was supposed to be on the left but no contact was made. Company B was supposed to be on the right but contact with it was unpredictable. Like Company B, however, Company A took off again.

Suggerath itself lay on the eastern side of the Würm in Company B's zone. Nevertheless, the whole area was tightly organized and Company A stumbled into the hardest resistance of the day outside the town. First, an artillery barrage caught it just west of Suggerath. In front of the company were two houses from which three machine guns were also making life uncomfortable. Off the road from these houses, stretching toward the northwest, was a wooded hill. After the artillery barrage eased up, the tanks came up and plastered the houses. The machine gunners decided the war had gone far enough for them. In the houses, the doughboys learned that two enemy companies were settled in the woods of that hill next to them.

It was dusk. The 2nd and 3rd Platoons plunged into the woods and climbed the hill. In a few minutes, they were on it. German equipment was scattered everywhere but not the promised German soldiers. It was too dark to investigate and the men dug in. At 8 o'clock, that hill provided the first of its surprises. Unexpectedly, a British patrol appeared. A British

major congratulated the company on throwing back a German counterattack. Unfortunately, no one had heard about the counterattack. It developed that three Tiger tanks and German infantry had staged a counterattack at dusk against the British force on the left flank of Company A. At that very moment, the two platoons attacked the hill, firing furiously all the way. Unwittingly, they were firing in the direction of the German counterattack aimed at the British. The enemy was surprised by this heavy flanking fire and withdrew toward Würm.

A second surprise came the next morning, November 20. A patrol was sent out to comb the woods and came back with 78 German prisoners, officers and men. This group was picked up on the southwest side of the hill. In other words, while our two platoons were perched on top of the hill all night, a strong German force was waiting behind them at the bottom of the hill. The enemy gave up when they realized they were surrounded, but our men might have spent a less restful night if they had known what they were sleeping on.

The 1st Battalion had finished a good day's work. Company C was dug in on the outskirts of Suggerath. Less than 100 yards in front of its foxholes was a slight rise in ground. At the top of this slope were six pillboxes. The position was not the sort that promised much rest. Company A was dug in west of Suggerath.

One of the brightest aspects of the entire action both in Prummern and in Geilenkirchen was the tank-infantry teamwork. It was made all the more interesting by the fact that the tankers were British and the infantry American. The tankers were veterans and the infantrymen were going into battle for the first time. The British tankers earned the admiration and enthusiasm of our men even though they stopped for a bit of tea at the most unlikely moments. They were absolutely fearless and selfless even when they had to take heavy losses. The Siegfried Line was not a playground for tanks. One of our officers who worked closely with them, Lt. Kenneth L. Ayres of the 333rd's Company A, said, "I was sold on the British. Those boys were good. There's not a man in my company who will say there's anything wrong with a British soldier because of the support we got from those tankers."

Near the Würm, life was not even as nice as mud. Rain was positively abnormal, as if the ground was not soft and swampy enough. In some places, especially in Company A's sector, water oozed up to a foot from the top of the foxholes. Every man was perpetually drenched. When the shells started flying close, there was nothing to do but duck one's head

under the water. For two days, November 20-21, the hours and then the minutes dragged out wearily for the 1st Battalion in those tiny lakes that began as foxholes. Then the 3rd Battalion took over responsibility for the zone and the 1st Battalion was ordered to follow the 3rd's advance. The 2nd was still held in reserve.

The Long Axis

By taking Prummern, Geilenkirchen, and Suggerath, we made an important dent in our sector of the Siegfried Line. But our mission was peculiarly difficult if the direction of our attack is considered for a moment.

On our right flank, after a hard fight, the 2nd Armored captured the town of Gereonsweiler on November 20. At this point, the 102nd Infantry Division was brought into action. It passed through the 2nd Armored to push the attack towards Linnich. Since a bridgehead at Linnich was one of the two basic objectives of the entire drive—the other was a bridgehead at Julich further south—this thrust on our right flank was trying to go to the river by the shortest route.

There was one major problem in order to get to Linnich from Gereonsweiler and to stay in Linnich once there. West of Linnich, in easy artillery and mortar range, was a cluster of five villages, so tightly packed together that they were practically a single segment. These villages were Müllendorf, Würm, Leiffarth, Lindern, and Beeck. The formation of these villages in a crescent shape and the laborious skill with which they were fortified and made mutually supporting put this area in a class by itself. The number of pillboxes alone made a sixth village. Mine fields, trenches, anti-tank ditches, wire barriers, weapon pits, painstaking camouflage, and, above all, an abundance of artillery, were lavished on a comparatively small sector.

By November 21, the 183rd Volksgrenadier Division which opposed us originally was battered almost beyond recognition and at least one regiment had to be disbanded. The defense of this zone was taken over by the elements of two superior outfits, the 9th Panzer Division and the 15th Panzer Grenadier Division. As a result, the likelihood that we could get something for nothing was reduced to the vanishing point. The German command knew that the best fortifications were worthless without soldiers to fight fiercely from them and they hastened to supply those soldiers before it was too late.

This cluster of strong points may be studied as a prize example of its kind. The problem of those five villages and everything in between was the problem of the Siegfried Line at its worst.

From these five strong points, the enemy was able to frustrate or make hopelessly expensive a push to Linnich. Such a push would have to reckon at minimum with heavy enemy fire from the east, from across the Roer River, and from the north, from the direction of Brachelen. The Würm-Lindern-Beeck triangle was perfectly placed to catch our attack from the rear. In fact, as long as this cluster held out, Linnich was not the only target. Gereonsweiler was one of the hottest spots in the whole sector for days after it was officially captured. The five towns were like a shield behind which the Germans were able to send terrific artillery concentrations against our forward positions.

To protect the drive to Linnich, the 84th had to smash the Würm-Lindern-Beeck triangle. It was an assignment to shake old divisions. The job was begun on our third day.

It is interesting to notice the *direction* of the 84th's attack. After Geilenkirchen, Prummern, and Gereonsweiler fell, we had crashed three-quarters of the way through the Siegfried Line. In effect, we were cutting across the line. By aiming at the Würm-Lindern-Beeck triangle, however, the 84th had to attack up the *long axis* of the Siegfried Line, to smash at one strong point after another. The two directions were complementary and one had to open a hole for the other.

This was the prospect before us on November 21 when the 333rd's 3rd Battalion passed through the 333rd's 1st Battalion on the road from Suggerath to Müllendorf and Würm.

The Long Week

It is time to glance at the map again. The next two objectives were Beeck and Würm (Map 4). From Prummern to Beeck was a distance of approximately 1200 yards. From our positions outside Suggerath to Würm was approximately the same distance. Obviously these were the shortest, most direct routes, though this was not necessarily the most important consideration. The two chief roads to Lindern came from Geilenkirchen on the south and Linnich on the east. In between there was virtually a roadless vacuum. The only other approach of any consequence ran from Gere-

onsweiler in the center, but it was more a trail than a road, and the mud and rain made it very doubtful whether even a jeep could get through. Since we did not have Linnich precisely because we did not have Lindern yet, and because Gereonsweiler was getting the worst shelling of all, the only alternative as far as a decent road net was concerned was the Geilenkirchen one.

Yet, if we knew it, the enemy did, too. The roads were mined like cabbage patches. Pillboxes were bunched together. All the villages were planted squarely on the roads and, whenever the houses were defended bitterly, they had to be taken one by one, then one block after another. The enemy could afford to withdraw 1000 yards to stiffen his resistance by drawing us farther and farther into his prepared positions. Above all, the avenues of approach were so narrow that every inch of the way was subject to staggering artillery fire. This ground was ideal for a battle of attrition.

The first thing was to test the enemy frontally, to see what would happen if we tried to get to Beeck from Prummern and to Würm from Suggerath, to advance if possible over the shortest and most direct route. Yet it was obvious that the road to Würm and Beeck was much harder and longer than the number of yards might seem. It was not the number of yards that counted but the number of yards for which we had to fight.

At noon, November 21, the 333rd's Battalion began the attack on Müllendorf and Würm from the outskirts of Suggerath. Company I moved out on the right of the Würm River, Company K on the left, Company M in support from the high ground east of Suggerath. The six pillboxes on the high ground in front of Müllendorf began to strafe them immediately. The enemy artillery had first-rate observation. Direct fire of small arms was equally dangerous. Company K was able to advance about 100 yards in the first hour, but Company I had to work its way even more slowly.

Unfortunately, the tanks were not in a position to help out as much here as they had elsewhere at critical moments. The roads were great splashes of mud. The main Suggerath-Würm highway was heavily mined. Two tanks tried to move forward to help Company K and were knocked out by direct hits. Company I was tangled up in the first pillbox, which was resisting fiercely. All that day the battalion tried in vain to smash through.

The second day of the attack, November 22, was more successful, though again a break-through was impossible. The 3rd Battalion jumped off again at noon but the tanks lagged behind as they could not get across a bridge. The engineers were still working on it. Company I had to start out alone.

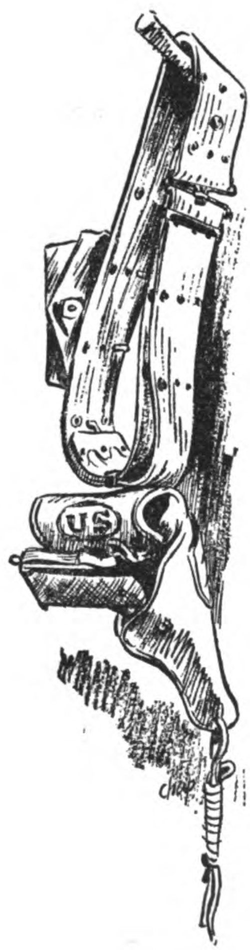
Ahead was a clear field, then the first two pillboxes on the hill. Enemy mortars and machine guns scattered lead around them immediately. Finally, the tanks—flame throwers—showed up. Fire squirted out of them. German soldiers fled in panic from the pillboxes. The flame throwers were quickly effective when they came up to a pillbox; the problem was always to get them close enough. Eighteen Germans came out of the first two, later 20 from a third.

After the first three pillboxes, the next three were comparatively easy. The flame throwers moved forward again. The doughboys took care of the connecting trenches. Three more pillboxes were knocked out. Nevertheless, the tanks had to stop because their fuel trailers had bogged down in the mud. Company I reorganized along the hill. Again it started out alone, this time to Müllendorf. It was able to go as far as a pillbox near the railroad tracks just in front of the village. The fate of the other pillboxes had convinced the Germans in this one that it was not a healthy place to stay. They abandoned it, covering it by fire. Artillery farther back was also brought to bear on it. Though the enemy had left the pillbox, we could not get in. That night, Company I dug in in front of the six pillboxes which had been knocked out. In effect, the road from Suggerath to Müllendorf had been cleared, but Müllendorf itself was still barred. The next day, November 23, was the same story. Three days of rain had forced the tanks to drop out of the attack altogether. GI's were living in water up to their waists. After six days of continuous fighting on a very narrow front, the enemy's guns were zeroed in and barrages were intense.

The frontal approach was also wasted on Beeck. On November 19, the 102nd's 405th Infantry was temporarily attached to the 84th (our 335th Combat Team was still attached to the 30th Infantry Division, leaving us one regiment short). On November 22, the 405th tried to take Beeck, again from the south. After two days of grim effort, some units were able to reach the outskirts of the village but could not break into it and hold it. In some respects, the problem of Beeck was even harder than the problem of Müllendorf. South and east of Beeck was a long stretch of open country which had to be negotiated before the village itself could be assaulted. The enemy's defenses were strong and tight enough, his terrain was favorable enough, to drain off enough of our attacking force on the way to Beeck so that the final punch was lacking.

On November 18 and November 19, when we had launched the attack on Prummern and Geilenkirchen, our advance was relatively rapid and the objectives were taken. From November 20 to November 24, we tried to

push our advantage, but the enemy's defenses stiffened as we penetrated deeper into his strong points. On November 25, a lull settled on the battlefield. The first phase was over. For the next three days, both sides licked their wounds. For us, it was a time above all to reopen the question, to hit the enemy and this time to hit him decisively in another way. In that mud, rain, shellfire, and desolation, November 20-27 was a long week.



CHAPTER IV

Lindern

The Siegfried Line was not "broken." It was chipped off nut by nut, bolt by bolt. It was not a one-sided and not a one-tracked battle. Sometimes the enemy would throw in superior forces in one corner of the front. Sometimes we would start to take a place from one direction, and experience would force us to conclude that it was more profitable to take it from another. The enemy was determined. He was fighting on his own soil. His defenses were unprecedented. His allies, the cold, the rain, and the mud, were heartbreaking.

If we did manage to smash these formidable German fortifications, the *team* was responsible. The team was made up of infantrymen, artillerymen, tankers, tank destroyers, anti-aircraft, reconnaissance troops, engineers, medics, signal men, the quartermaster and ordnance men behind them, the dozens of specialized arts and crafts and sciences that belong not only in every division, but almost in every company. Nevertheless, the infantryman, the dirty, tired, smelly, anonymous doughboy, had a very special place in the achievement, although as only one member of the team. He would have been helpless many times without all the others.

The Siegfried Line was not a good place for so-called mechanized warfare. It was a graveyard for tanks. Tankers like to know where they are going and how they are going to get there before they start out. They like solid ground and protection from direct, observed fire. This devouring mud, this relatively flat land, and the enemy's advantages in shelling us from commanding positions were very discouraging. If the tankers helped out as much as they did, it was a tribute to their courage and convictions. But so often the tanks simply could not come up or came up too late or suffered too heavily because they made such good targets.

Some of the other arms were affected less. On many days the air force was grounded, but even when the weather was right, the concrete dugouts of the Siegfried Line were very uneconomical targets for air power. On the

other hand, artillery air observers were able to fly daily. Bad weather and bad terrain never held the engineers out of any assault. Neither did they impede in any way the artillery support, either in fire over an entire area to keep hostile heads down, or in direct fire at definite targets. The thicker the fortifications, the more important the beehive charge of the engineers and the concussive effect of the heavier caliber guns.

But there were times when the bravery, the stamina, and the stubbornness of the infantry were almost decisive. After all, they had to fling themselves out first and farthest. At least for the infantry, the human element may still and often does make a difference between victory and defeat. From afar, a battle may take on a simplicity and a logic which it never had for the men who had to fight it. To them there may have been dozens of times when they despaired or wondered how they could ever come out in one piece. There were hundreds of temptations. Yet, somehow, they came through.

Why? It may be possible to watch an action of this kind at the town of Lindern where a combination of circumstances forced a few infantrymen to hold out long enough to bring the entire team into play. It is also an opportunity to see the responsibility of the very smallest unit in the first hours of a major action.

Try, Try Again

The basic problem was still the same: how to drive the Germans out of the Würm-Lindern-Beeck triangle. In the first phase, November 18-24, we tried to break into the triangle from the Würm-Beeck side. We attacked frontally.

The attack on the triangle from the Lindern side was a fresh approach to the problem. Instead of trying to crack the triangle from the southwest, from the direction of Suggerath, we would try to crack it from the southeast, from the direction of Gereonsweiler (Map 4). Instead of taking Würm and Beeck frontally, we would take them from behind. Once we had gained a foothold in Lindern, Würm and Beeck would face fire from two sides, from Suggerath and Prummern and from Lindern.

But Lindern was also a daring solution. In no sense was it an easier objective unless we could count on the element of surprise. Inside the triangle, midway between Lindern and Beeck, was a stretch of high ground which had been one of the enemy's main points of resistance from the very

beginning. Behind the triangle, north of Lindern, was another stretch of even higher ground which dominated the sector as a whole. To the east, across the Roer River, the enemy had perfect observation of our route to Lindern and his batteries were almost immune. An anti-tank ditch about 12 feet wide and 6 feet deep guarded the approaches to the open side of the triangle to the south between Lindern and Beeck. Patrols from the 84th Reconnaissance Troop had not been able to reach the ditch against strong small arms fire from positions in front of the ditch. Above all, to get to Lindern from Gereonsweiler, our men had to cross about 2500 yards of ruthlessly flat land. They had to fling themselves in the very center of the enemy line, thereby inviting counterattacks from every possible side. They had to depend on a single road, and a relatively bad one at that, between Gereonsweiler and Lindern, even if they managed to run the long gauntlet into the town. The enemy's artillery was admittedly terrific.

For this fresh approach, fresh forces were needed. Fortunately, they were available. On November 26, the 335th Infantry and the 909th Field Artillery came back to the 84th and next day the 405th Infantry returned to the 102nd. For the first time in combat, the 84th was united. Lindern was the 335th's first major operation, as Geilenkirchen had been for the 333rd and Prummern for the 334th.

The enemy had been attacked in front of Beeck for about ten days and expected more. Every effort was made not to disappoint him. The 333rd was ordered to bring as much fire as possible to bear on Beeck from the southwest—but only fire. The idea was to draw as much attention as possible to the 333rd and away from the 335th.

As for the 335th, two of its battalions were going to attack simultaneously. Its 3rd Battalion was sent to Lindern itself. Its 2nd Battalion was sent out to get a hill between Lindern and Beeck. Its 1st Battalion was held in reserve. The infantry was supported by tanks, engineers, and artillery. Two companies of the 40th Tank Battalion were attached to the 335th, Company A in direct support of the 3rd Battalion, and Company B in reserve with the 1st Battalion. Each battalion also had one platoon of combat engineers and one of armored engineers, the former to destroy pillboxes and other installations, the latter to clear mines from a gap in the anti-tank ditch. The 909th Field Artillery, with the 693rd Field Artillery attached, furnished direct support for the 335th. The corps artillery was stronger than before, but we could not expect any help from the British artillery as at Prummern and Geilenkirchen.

In the planning stage, there were three big bogies. The 3rd Battalion's

assembly area was near Apweiler, about 1500 yards southwest of the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road, so that a rather long trek was necessary even to get on the right track. From there, it was another 1000 yards to the anti-tank ditch which had been reconnoitered but was still something of an unknown quantity. Finally, there were about 500 yards to the center of Lindern, and these 500 yards as far as we knew, might have been held in strength.

To lessen some of these risks, we were willing to take some risks. It was felt that our leading elements might be able to slip through the enemy's forward positions if they started out early enough. An hour's "night march" before daylight might increase the danger of missing the all-important Gereonsweiler-Lindern road or of falling afoul of the anti-tank ditch but it would also lessen the threat of enemy fire. That was no small consideration in a race across 2500 yards of flat, open country. In the end, it was decided to jump off an hour before dawn, a fateful decision.

Two companies of the 3rd Battalion, Company I and Company K, led the attack, with Company L in reserve. Company I was given the right side of the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road, Company K the left side—when they got to it. How to control such a long march through hostile territory and in the darkness was recognized as such a delicate business that each company was equipped with more radio equipment than usual—two SCR 300's and one SCR 509.

The battle of Lindern was also the debut of the XIII Corps. On November 23, the 84th reverted back to the XIII Corps. On November 24, the 102nd also came back to the XIII Corps and relieved the 2nd Armored Division on our right flank. On November 25, the 113th Cavalry Group was attached to the 84th to protect the division's left flank. The 84th Reconnaissance Troop held a portion of the line south of Müllendorf.

The Long March

The third D-Day was November 29. H-Hour was 6:30 in the morning. The 335th's 3rd Battalion slept in the village of Immendorf part of the night. In utter darkness they marched to an assembly area about 300 yards north of Apweiler. There they waited for an hour. The wait, the men said, was as hard as anything. They lined up in columns of twos, only about 3 yards apart. They did not want to get too far from each other in the night.

The first job was to get to the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road. To do this,

they had to make a quarter circle. Everyone was jumpy about missing the road. It was easily possible to walk into Linnich instead of Lindern without something to guide on. Contact between Company K and Company I was very troublesome from the start. Luckily, a few enemy flares went up in the first few minutes. They caused no damage and helped out a little. When the flares fell down in those slow seconds, the men froze but they jumped up hastily as soon as they realized no enemy fire was following. They were stripped down to the bare essentials, a rifle belt, gas mask, two bandoleers of ammunition, and three bars of chocolate. Everything was sacrificed for speed.

The trip to the road was fast and furious. Not a shot was fired the first 500 yards. Then a couple of machine guns opened up on the Company I side on the right. A burst of rifle and BAR fire shut them up. Company K hit the road before it was fired at. Four machine guns and some mortars came close. One mortar shell actually landed in the middle of the 1st Platoon but no one was hurt. It was one of those things. Maybe the mud absorbed most of the shock, the men thought. One enemy bullet, however, was expensive. It hit the aerial of the 300. The radioman ran back for the spare 300 in the 4th Platoon in the rear but he was never seen again. They tried the 509 immediately. It was dead. From then on, Company K was out alone, isolated.

The anti-tank ditch was the first great crisis. Before the attack, the men had drilled into them the danger of holding up at the ditch. If they were caught in it, they knew that the enemy's artillery would ruin them. The 1st Platoon of Company K hit the worst section of the ditch, which was made up of huge steps about 2 feet high and 2 feet wide. The men ran, jumped, fell, and slid. The mud was thick and slippery. Nevertheless, not a man in the platoon was lost in the scramble through it. The 3rd Platoon of Company K was even luckier. It happened to hit the ditch at the gap and the men did not even know that they were crossing it. Elsewhere, in Company I's sector, the ditch was V-shaped but flattened at the bottom and it was much easier to cross.

There were losses, severe losses. Company K was split in half. The 1st and 3rd Platoons in the lead had been moving so fast that they obtained the maximum benefit of surprise. But by the time the 2nd and 4th Platoons came up, the element of surprise was finished. They were pounded without letup by German artillery, mortars, machine guns, and small arms. They never arrived at the ditch. As for Company I, only the 3rd Platoon was able to get beyond the ditch. The other three were lost on the way.

It must be considered that the leading platoons ran through nests of German resistance without cleaning them up. Their mission was to get through to Lindern and to leave the mopping up to others. The result was that the enemy's outposts were awake in time to bring their own fire and their artillery's fire on our rear. By the time our reserves were thrown in, it was fully daylight, the secret was out, and the Germans were ready to pour it on. They did.

So, at the ditch, at about 7 o'clock that morning, we had two platoons of Company K and one platoon of Company I or less than half the force that led the way. Yet, and this is striking, the platoons that came through were practically intact. It was another case of leading or losing.

Lindern Is Where You Find It

As soon as they had crossed the ditch, our three platoons began to look for the town. They were lucky a little while longer. Daylight was coming in slowly and a heavy fog was hanging in the air. A church steeple was supposed to identify Lindern. Everyone began to peer for it. They came closer and closer and still no steeple. Fortunately, it was decided that they were nearing the right place, steeple or no steeple. They went on straight ahead but the next few minutes were fearfully long. One of the cruellest mental hazards in attack is the strange thought that you may be attacking the wrong place. Only later did we learn that there was a church steeple in Brachelen and one in Linnich but none in Lindern.

It was not until they saw a brickyard at the left edge of town that they breathed more easily, because it was supposed to be there. The three platoons went through Lindern at about the same time by about 7:30. They did not look for trouble. They had been told to dig in at the far end, just outside Lindern to the north, and to leave the mopping up to others. The platoons raced through back yards and orchards, staying out of streets where they could be picked off more easily. On the run, they threw a few grenades into some houses. In Lindern too, the enemy's late reaction was another evidence of the decisive surprise achieved by the vanguard of the attack. Except for two or three bursts of fire from a house here and there, Lindern was still sleeping.

Just outside the town, the three platoons came to a railroad bank about 20 feet high. Then they knew they were right. It was clearly on their maps. At this time, the men of Company K knew that only half of them had come

through but they still did not know that they were accompanied by only one platoon of Company I, not the entire company. Company I men knew that only one-quarter of them had come through but they still hoped for more from Company K. Some men said it was just as well they did not know the truth until much later.

The railroad track was another crisis that never developed. Since the track was so high, enemy snipers on the other side might have picked them off with ease. They ran up and over in small groups. Once over the railroad track, they were out of Lindern. For the last time, they began to look around for some place to dig in. The Company K men were surprised to run into some more buildings just beyond the track. They turned out to be some long, low-slung, empty German barracks which, prisoners later said, had been used as a rest camp. Fifty yards in front of the barracks, they struck a fence. They bounced over it and began to dig in immediately. Someone happened to ask the Company Commander, Lt. Leonard R. Carpenter, for the time. It was exactly 7:45. They were digging in on the reverse slope of a very slight rise in ground, the crest of which was about 250 yards in front of them. They decided not to move up to the top because they could be seen less easily where they were. The ground was soft, digging easy. It was still very gray, misty.

Only then were they able to take stock. Lt. Creswell Garlington, Jr., of Company I's 3rd Platoon ran over to Lt. Carpenter. He had 35 men of his platoon and a mortar section of 5 men. Lt. Carpenter had 32 men in his 1st Platoon, 18 men in his 3rd, 6 from his 4th, and 4 from his company headquarters. After another good look at the maps, ground, the town behind them, and their aerial photos, they decided they were just where they were supposed to be.

And so, less than two hours after the jump-off, 100 men had raced through 2 miles of fire and mud, had landed at just the right place at just the right time, had dug in, Lindern at their back, the unknown enemy in front. Those who got through were a bit surprised at their own success and had only a vague idea why more than half of their outfits had been lost on the way. They were not too worried, yet. They expected relief to come up at any moment and they would have been horrified to learn that they were out there alone, that the chance of getting relief in a matter of hours was slim. The enemy surrounded them on all sides, in the rear, at the flanks, to the front. The enemy's fire on the routes to Lindern was prohibitive. They were cut off, their radios shot up or stubbornly unco-operative. Luckily, everything was still vague, including their troubles.

All Alone and Nowhere to Go

But everything was not vague for long. They were digging for only about 15 minutes when they heard harsh, grinding noises behind them. They twisted their necks and saw three German medium tanks rolling down the road through Lindern to Randerath. The tanks came right at Company K's 3rd Platoon. Lt. Carpenter was expecting our tanks to appear at any moment and thought at first that they were friendly. But some men saw the black crosses. A bazooka hit the middle tank but the round bounced off. The tanks passed by the foxholes and drove on to Randerath.

If there were any illusions, those tanks shattered them. We did not know whether the tanks had been in Lindern all night and we had run past them in the dark or whether the tanks had come in from Würm or Leiffarth on the left and had turned northward in Lindern. In any case, the tanks came from the rear. Obviously something was wrong back there.

A few minutes after these three tanks drove off from Lindern to Randerath, three other tanks, German Tigers, came down the same road from Randerath to Lindern. About 400 yards in front of Company K, off the Lindern-Randerath road, a pillbox was clearly visible. Two tanks stopped at the pillbox and began to parade around. The third moved ponderously down the road and stopped right inside our lines. Evidently the tank commander was not sure of himself. Suddenly he stood up from the turret to look around. A rifle clipped him. He slumped over the top. The tank moved forward into Lindern for about 100 yards, backed up, and just as methodically returned to the vicinity of the pillbox.

Meanwhile one of those expensive accidents happened. A terrific barrage of white phosphorus landed right in the middle of the machine gun section, which tried to pull back 100 yards and dig in. No sooner had they changed positions than an artillery concentration came down on them.

Now only two and a half platoons were left in Lindern. By any standards, their position was desperate. Perhaps it would have been fatal, except for one thing. The enemy did not know how desperate the position was. The tanks could have come up a whole row of foxholes and wiped them out. They had no anti-tank weapons, no communications, were running short of bazooka and mortar rounds, and had to depend almost entirely on small arms. About 500 yards to their front, over the crest of the slight rise in ground, were several pillboxes. They could see three tanks near the pillboxes and four more about 800 yards away. Early in the morning, they

could also see Germans strolling around the pillboxes and smoking cigarettes, apparently oblivious to the Americans so near them. At 10 o'clock, however, small groups of German soldiers began to move down the road to the pillboxes and a little later trucks began to bring loads of them down.

The rest of the morning was slow torture. What saved them was the absence of a real counterattack. But there was always the danger that the tanks and the German soldiers in the pillboxes would come down on them in force, in overwhelming force. It was obvious that their luck might not hold out, that help was needed. One of the radios had been dropped at the railroad track. Volunteers went back to get it and worked on it for two hours. Finally they were able to establish contact with friendly tanks but only to hear and not to transmit. They sat helplessly in front of the radio as dim voices came over but they themselves could not send out a message for help. As a last resort, volunteers were asked to make the long, dangerous trip on foot back to battalion headquarters in the rear to call for aid. Four went. They never came back. All the while the rest of the men continued to dig in deeper and deeper, the enemy tanks went on parading, the pillboxes seemed full of activity. Yet there was no full-scale counterattack. It was enough to have to wait for one.

The Build-Up

And what was going on in the rear? Where were the reserves? Where were the tanks? Where was relief?

The reserve company of the 335th's 3rd Battalion was Company L and it was the first one committed to bring additional forces into Lindern. But this company did not move out until approximately 8:30 in the morning. It had to make the same long march but it was not protected by darkness or surprise. A half hour later, after a few hundred yards, enemy fire was so heavy that the company had to dig in, and it stayed in the open all that morning and most of the afternoon.

The original plan called for the tanks to follow the infantry into Lindern but the intense enemy fire and the appalling condition of the road had caused a long delay. In fact since communications were out, the tank commanders did not know where the infantry was. Company K had one radio link to the tanks but it was one-way all that morning. While a half dozen men were tinkering with that radio in a muddy foxhole outside Lindern, the tankers were waiting in Gereonsweiler, a mile and a half away, for some

indication that they had infantry to follow. Artillery concentrations to reduce the volume of enemy fire were dropped on Lindern and on many other spots in the rear of these precious platoons whose whereabouts was unknown and even unsuspected.

When radios go dead, they are the most exasperating pieces of junk in the world. When they work, they are wonderful. When they work in a foxhole and tankers hear them a mile and a half away, they are magic. At about 1 o'clock on the afternoon of November 29, one radio in a Lindern foxhole was magic. Suddenly it worked. It was fixed by tearing off the aerial of an SCR-536, a handie-talkie set, hitching it up to a picket fence with a piece of adhesive tape, and running a telephone wire from the aerial to the radio. The magic words, which a tank officer picked out of the air, were: "We made a touchdown at 0745."

When this message went through, the morale of the men in Lindern rocketed. It was their first break. In Prummern, the commander of the 40th Tank Battalion, Lt. Col. John C. Brown, acted immediately. He ordered his Company A to forget about bad roads, mine obstacles, and infantry support and get out to Lindern. Company A did. One tank was knocked out in the trip. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon, six Sherman tanks made contact with Company K. The sight of those tanks was pure bliss. The complete isolation of the infantry was broken. It had lasted about six hours. "When we saw those tanks, we figured the whole German Army couldn't drive us out of there," a doughboy said.

At 2:15 the 335th's 1st Battalion was committed to help out the 3rd Battalion. Company A and B led off, Company C in reserve. They had to guide on the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road also and by this time 88's seemed to be plowing up every yard around it. In addition Germans were dug in along the way. In fact, since the 3rd Battalion's three platoons had slipped through in the darkness, the 1st Battalion was our first force which had to fight its way through in broad daylight. One counterattack from the Lindern-Linnich road on the right, involving about 75 enemy infantrymen, came at 4:30 and was beaten back only after our artillery, mortars, machine guns, and riflemen were brought into play. By the time we reached the anti-tank ditch for the second time, it was dark and more than three hours of continuous shelling, shooting, and wading in the mud had been going on. At the ditch, the 1st Battalion made a detour to the northwest in order to avoid enemy fire from the direction of the Linnich-Lindern road. It was ready to enter the town from the west at about 8 o'clock. By that time, Company B, 40th Tank Battalion, and Company L, 3rd Battalion,

had already entered by the more direct route and Company L had dug in on the eastern edge of Lindern. At about 9 o'clock, the 1st Battalion's three companies went in and took over the western and southwestern sides of the town (Map 5).

The night of November 29 was relatively quiet. Again the lull was lucky. It gave us time to get set for the counterattacks which were sure to come. By November 30, we had two infantry battalions, two tank companies, and a tank destroyer company in Lindern. One infantry battalion had suffered heavy losses but the other was almost intact. Our forces were spread all around the town, though there were some gaps in our lines which would prove very costly. Nevertheless, the enemy had lost his great chance to kick us out. Instead of three platoons, he now faced a force five times stronger, armor as well as infantry. Until about 5 o'clock that evening, we were in Lindern with such a small, tired, harrassed group of men that our grip was very uncertain. It was only four hours later when the 1st Battalion came in that it could be said that we had taken the town. But that first little group had fooled the enemy into believing it was immeasurably stronger, for otherwise he would not have waited so long to mount a counterattack in strength. If our men, surrounded and alone, were worried, the enemy was worried even more and probably even more puzzled by the turn of events.

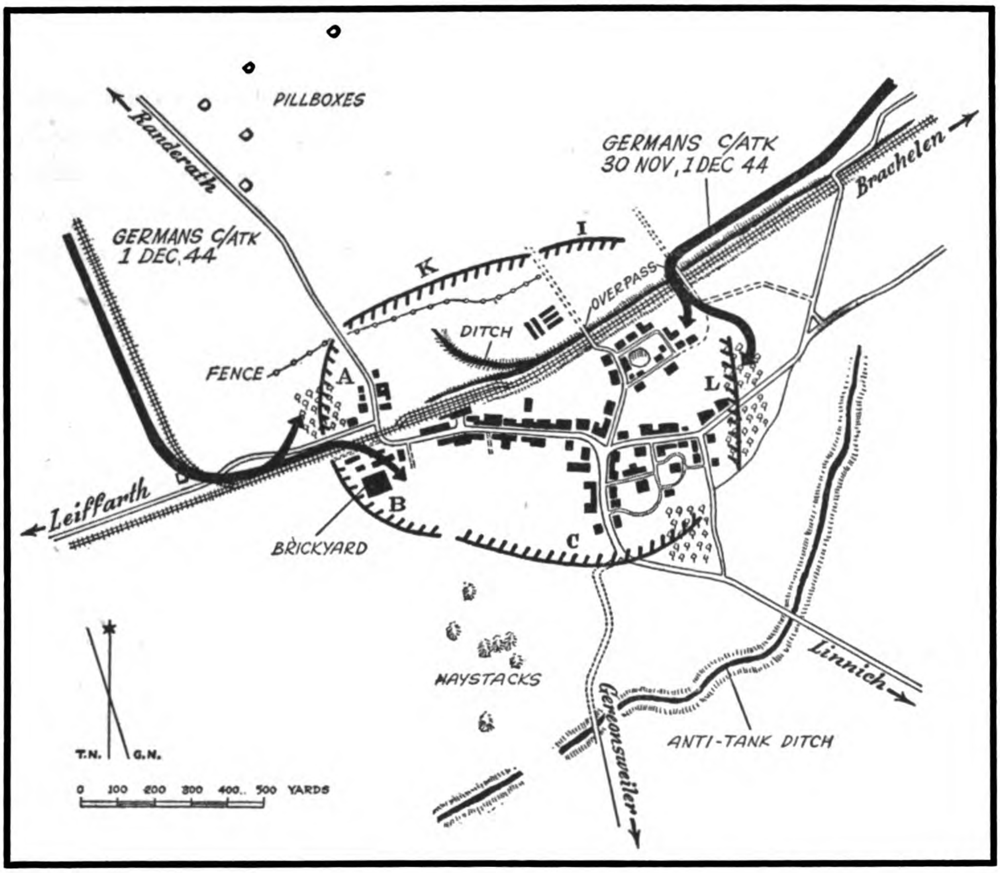
The Third Strike

One reason the Germans lost Lindern and with Lindern the entire sector was the fact that they lost a guessing game. If a commander knew as much about the enemy as he did about his own side, war might be a science. Most often he has to guess what the enemy has, where he is, and what he will do, and not infrequently, he may even have to guess how his own men will show up. As a result, war is also an art, a hunch, and a battle of wits.

The Germans had guessed wrong the first time when they did not expect the attack on Lindern and did not have a strong force in town when our first troops went through it. Our losses were mainly suffered on the march to Lindern and German artillery was largely responsible. The enemy had a good deal of strength farther back, but a whole day was wasted bringing a counterattacking force forward. Then the Germans guessed wrong a second time because the cautiousness with which they mounted the counterattack indicated that they gave us credit for more than we had in

Lindern most of November 29. Not only was their infantry action overcautious but their tank tactics were surprisingly weak. Their information was obviously poor, their hunches worse.

On November 29, the enemy groups encountered between Gereonsweiler and Lindern belonged to the 1st Battalion, 21st Panzer Grenadier Regiment,



5. THE BATTLE OF LINDERN

10th SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg." In the course of the day, one after another of our units pushed through this battalion but did not wipe it out. Having failed to stop us before Lindern, having held insufficient forces in the town to stop us in Lindern, the enemy had to retake it, but in order to do so had to bring elements of another division into action. These were recruited from three cut-up battalions of the 9th Panzer Division. The way

they were committed shows how hard up the German command must have been. For example, the 1st Battalion, 10th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, had been pounded by us in the Prummern area until November 24. It was pulled out and sent back to Kempen, about 10 miles north of Lindern, for rest and replacements. When Lindern was lost, this battalion was rushed back, told that the Lindern sector was a highly critical one, that the town had to be recaptured regardless of losses. The same thing happened to the 2nd Battalion, 10th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and the 1st Battalion, 11th Panzer Grenadier Regiment.

As a result, by the time the Germans were ready to counterattack, they were guessing wrong a third time. If they had tried to throw us out on the morning or afternoon of November 29, they would not have needed as much as they brought down—in fact, they had enough tanks on the spot to overwhelm us. Once they missed the main chance, they did not bring down enough.

The More It Changes

Not that the German counterattacks, when they came, were not serious. We had to fight hard to hold Lindern but the important thing was that we had enough to fight with. Yet, despite their seriousness, even the counterattacks were oddly spaced.

The first enemy thrust came at about 5:30 in the morning, November 30. It was still dark. One of the 9th Panzer Division's battalions was involved. This force worked its way down the railroad from Brachelen and entered the town from the northeast. It was a lucky maneuver. The eastern side of Lindern was covered by the 335th's 3rd Battalion, the western side by the 335th's 1st Battalion, but the former had suffered the heaviest losses and its lines were very thin. Company I's 3rd Platoon was dug in above the railroad track, Company L below it, but a gap existed between the two (Map 5). By coming down the railroad track in the dark, the Germans slipped through the gap. Some Germans went right into the town. Others wandered into Company L's foxholes on the western edge. We had two tank companies in the town, and the enemy was apparently worried by our tank strength because this assault force was organized into teams which were armed to an unusual extent with German bazookas. Each man carried an extra bazooka round. Their mission apparently was to knock out our armor in preparation for a follow-up attack by German tanks and infantry.

In the town itself, while it was still dark, we lost two medium and two light tanks. In some streets, wild fighting went on between our tankers and the enemy raiders. In the Company L area, the mix-up was just as confused because it was still too dark for either side to fight clearly. The melee lasted more than an hour. At daybreak, the enemy raiding party began to withdraw back to Brachelen again along the railroad track, but it was much harder to get away than to get in. At the overpass at the eastern edge of town, a five-man Company I patrol, led by Lt. Garlington, caught the fleeing Germans on the rebound and picked them off like Coney Island Hitlers. S/Sgt. Michael Citrak claimed that as many as 60 were never going to fight for the fatherland again. The first counterattack was finished off by 8 o'clock. German artillery pounded the town and their tanks dueled with ours the rest of the day, but another 24 hours were safely passed.

Lindern was much too important to give up that easily. The German commander had one more bolt in him. On the morning of the third day, December 1, he shot it. The timing was approximately the same—while it was still dark at about 6 o'clock. Instead of hitting only one side of the town, however, this time the enemy hit the eastern and western sides simultaneously. One *Kampfgruppe* went through the gap between Company I and Company L on the eastern side. Another came from Randerath and struck Company A and Company B on the western side (Map 5). About eight Mark IV and V tanks backed up each try. The artillery preparation was so heavy that one of our officers said: "If there had been any more shells, they would have been colliding in the air."

The darkness again made it possible for the Germans to get at our tanks. In fact, the tankers were mixed up in some of the worst scrambles. Since a tanker who has to fight outside his tank is like a fish who has to swim out of water, their part in the action was particularly bitter. When the enemy scrambled onto one of our tanks, another sprayed it with machine gun fire. One German jumped on a tank and was heard to say in good English, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, please let me in." Other Germans liked to yell: "Surrender for Hitler!" Only one tank was disabled.

The second battle in Company L's sector was very much like the first, except there was more of it. The darkness was the enemy's great advantage in creeping up to our lines and slipping through. Germans and GI's were mixed up so thoroughly for a while that both were crying in the dark for identification. Sgt. Richard H. Bonney yelled at a black form in front of his foxhole: "GI?" The answer was, "No, SS." A moment later, the SS man tumbled into Bonney's foxhole but the SS had no more use for him. Most

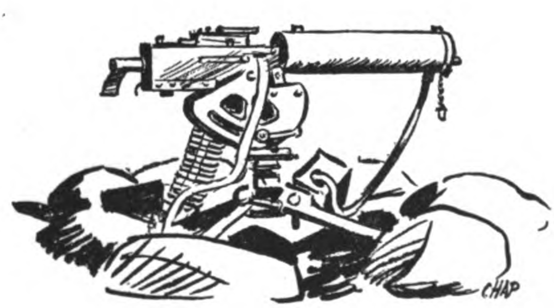
of the fighting ended at daylight again, but small groups were dealt with most of that morning.

The counterattack in the 1st Battalion's sector was more serious. Company A was hit hardest a bit after 6 a.m. The left flank gave it some trouble but the Germans were never able to break through, not that they did not come near enough. When darkness lifted, 15 bodies were found among our foxholes. Company B took care of the rest, though about 20 infiltrated through our lines and had to be rounded up in town. Judging from the prisoner total—Company B alone took 25—and the dead and wounded scattered near our foxholes and in the streets, very few of the raiders got back. The Germans also lost at least seven tanks from artillery and anti-tank fire. The hottest fighting took 15 minutes.

By December 2, Lindern was safe, although the town had to be mopped up every morning because some enemy snipers infiltrated each night. For many days, it was one of the unhealthiest pieces of real estate in that part of Germany. The enemy's artillery concentration on the afternoon of December 2 was his heaviest effort in the entire battle. The position of Lindern was ideal for artillery barrages with maximum effect and the Germans took advantage of it, not only while our grip on the town was still debatable, but as long as we stayed on the western side of the Roer. Our lines in Lindern stuck out like a point as long as the enemy still held Würm on the left and Linnich on the right. It was easy to concentrate on the point, especially since the enemy had excellent observation posts in Randerath and Linnich. We were even more sensitive in the matter of supplies. The Gereonsweiler-Lindern road was the only link to the rear. It was a slender link at best and its 4000 yards were always slightly suicidal. For Lindern, the 335th's Company K was given a presidential unit citation.

Evacuation of the wounded from Lindern was one of the hardest problems of the battle. It was not merely that the town was so hot that it was difficult to get out as well as to get in. Once out, the only route to the rear was the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road. It was impossible in the first 48 hours for an ambulance to get through the mud and the enemy's artillery. All the vehicles sent up for the medics the first day were knocked out by enemy fire. Three 309th Medical Battalion ambulances were squeezed into Lindern on the third day but all three were smashed up in town. One shrapnel-riddled ambulance, however, was driven to the rear despite four flat tires. Almost all casualties were evacuated in weasels and half-tracks. The result was an added burden on the aid men who literally worked day and night pulling through the wounded under the most dangerous conditions.

What was "mechanized warfare" at Lindern or for that matter in almost all the battles of our muddy infantry? Were machines doing all the fighting, winning all the glory, making all the sacrifices? Nothing could be more dangerous nonsense. We captured Lindern because a few men in the first hours were told to go somewhere, went there, and stayed there. We held it because a few tankers disregarded all the golden rules of their trade and drove in to help out the doughboys. We beat back the counterattacks because a few more men blew into town before it was too late. The enemy lost Lindern because he was caught by surprise and then he could not take it back because he did not think fast enough. Modern warfare may be mechanized, but it has not been mechanized to the point where you can adjust some gadgets in the heart and brain of a man to keep him fighting.



CHAPTER V

Goodbye to the Siegfried Line

LINDERN was only half the battle on November 29. That same day, two other attacks were launched. In the morning, the 335th's 2nd Battalion threatened a hill between Beeck and Lindern, one of those obscure, worthless, vitally important hills. In the evening, the 333rd's 1st Battalion struck at Beeck itself.

One reason the enemy was overcautious in the first few hours at Lindern may have been the fact that his attention was drawn elsewhere simultaneously. The whole sector was aflame, either in real or diversionary attacks, and he could not afford to concentrate on Lindern before everything was clear. All day, November 29, he was receiving reports of heavy onslaughts or heavy preparations from Beeck to Lindern and everything between. He was, therefore, compelled to adopt a defensive attitude when what was immediately needed at Lindern, as far as he was concerned, was something much more aggressive.

The defense of the Beeck area was entrusted to the 22nd SS Panzer Grenadier Regiment, 10th SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg." This division was probably the enemy's best in our sector and its sudden appearance tended to bear out statements by prisoners that there was a "growing belief that this sector was becoming the most critical one and required the most vigorous defensive measures." The 10th SS had been used mainly against the British, first in Normandy around Caen, then in Holland in the Arnhem-Nijmegen area. Our first prisoners were quite surprised to find themselves in the hands of Americans. Since November 23, just about the time the 10th SS was sent in, our lines in front of Beeck had been quiet. The 10th SS had been pulled out of Holland only the week before and was expected to go to Germany for reorganization and rest. Instead, it turned up against us. The only rest it got was the week we needed to prepare the next attack.

The Battle of Toad Hill

Northeast of Beeck, in one corner of the triangle formed by Leiffarth, Würm, and Beeck, was a hill (Map 4). It was a nameless hill, not very impressive as hills go. Its code name was "Toad." No one knows why code names are what they are. On the hill were two pillboxes. They were noteworthy only because the men in them wanted to fight. Toad Hill was the objective of the 335th's 2nd Battalion. It was perhaps the most valuable piece of ground in the triangle because it dominated Beeck, Würm, and Leiffarth. We were determined to get it. The enemy was determined to hold it.

It should be kept in mind that all the fighting for this hill went on at the same time as the fighting for Lindern. The struggle for both was remarkably similar, but hills as a rule lack glamour. A hill is generally "that thing over there," a number, or a mysterious code name that nobody can remember five minutes after the action. Probably more men die for hills than for anything else in combat and nothing gets less recognition.

The 2nd Battalion moved out of Prummern at 4 a.m. Company F led off on the left, G on the right, and E stayed behind in reserve. The battalion wanted to skirt Beeck on the east, but, in order to do so, it had to get by a hill with a name—Schlacken Berg—on the southeast side of Beeck. Three German pillboxes guarded the base of Schlacken Hill and they were stubborn. They opened up on the two leading companies midway between Prummern and Beeck. The battalion had planned to get to the anti-tank ditch before daylight but this resistance made it impossible. The three pillboxes were knocked out but too late to take advantage of the darkness. Every time Companies F and G tried to go over the top of Schlacken Hill, they were cut down by fire from the pillboxes on Toad Hill. Two enemy tanks hid behind the pillboxes and would run out and fire whenever we tried to advance. Our tank destroyers could not get into position for a straight shot at them. Fire from the 8-inch howitzers, the heaviest artillery available, just caused them to move about enough to avoid a direct hit. There was nothing wrong with the nerve of those German tankers. Enemy artillery, rocket and mortar fire, was also massed in the entire area.

By noon, it was clear that Toad Hill had to be taken some other way. Company E was committed to break the deadlock. They were sent out on a wide detour of Schlacken Hill, almost as far as the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road, where some friendly tanks met them. The tanks did not try to cross

the ditch and merely supported the infantry by fire. The first stage of Company E's flanking maneuver was entirely successful. The momentum of the attack carried them right into the anti-tank ditch. One man jumped into the ditch, started to clear it out, turned one of the many corners, suddenly confronted a German officer. He happened to have a rifle grenade on his rifle, pulled the trigger at a range of about 20 feet, and blew off the German's head. There were several incidents like this one because these personal encounters were so sudden. After Company E had dashed to the ditch, F and G were able to scramble over the top of Schlacken Hill and to reach the network of trenches and emplacements at the Beeck end of the ditch.

This was the day's work but not enough for security. The three companies were dug in for the night at the anti-tank ditch but Beeck was wide open on their left and Lindern was still very confused on the right. Toad Hill was intact in front of them. The night of November 29-30 was the battalion's worst. The Germans were not content to defend; as soon as they felt we had settled down, they counterattacked. That night they attacked no less than six times from the high ground on Toad. To beat them back we called for artillery as close as 50 yards to our own positions. Just after midnight, the most dangerous threat came from Beeck itself. A strong force infiltrated through Company F's exposed left flank and almost endangered the day's gains. A platoon of Company H's machine guns saved the situation but none too soon.

As long as Beeck was not held firmly by us, Toad Hill was able to hold out. On November 30, the 334th's 1st Battalion passed through the 335th's 2nd Battalion in an effort to take the hill but was forced to stop short of the objective. An attempt by the 2nd Battalion's Company G to slip around the shoulder of the hills, which overlook Beeck from the east, in order to take the left pillbox, was also beaten back. As a result, we waited for the situation in Beeck to clear up before launching the final assault on Toad Hill and December 1 was spent in approximately the same position.

The Battle of Beeck

November 29 was a busy day and we are not yet finished with it. That morning, before daybreak, the 335th's 3rd Battalion had jumped off toward Lindern and the 335th's 2nd Battalion toward Toad Hill. Although we were firing into Würm and Beeck all morning and afternoon, this effort was diversionary and no direct attempt was made to take them. But at 7 p.m.

that evening, the 335th's 1st Battalion, which was attached to the 113th Cavalry Group, was ordered out of Prummern to attack Beeck. This was the third and last attempt of the day.

The 1st Battalion had to jump off without its Company A and its Company C had to be used to hold high ground southwest of Beeck, between Beeck and Prummern. At 7 p.m., the available units of the battalion moved out and, two and a half hours later, Company B had reached the southwestern outskirts of Beeck. It was late and dark and enemy small arms fire was heavy. It was decided to stay there for the night and launch a co-ordinated attack on the town next morning.

At 7:30, November 30, Company A joined the attack and tried to get into the eastern part of Beeck, but heavy enemy concentrations of artillery and mortar fire from Würm and Leiffarth held them out at the southeastern edges of the town. Company A stayed outside the rest of the day. Meanwhile, Company B, also at 7:30 that same morning, tried to advance in the western half, this time supported by four light tanks of the 744th Light Tank Battalion. As soon as they entered the town, they met stiff resistance from enemy snipers and machine guns who had had plenty of time to receive them. It was a yard-by-yard assault. By noon, they had gained about 250 yards but decided to stop and take stock. At this, the enemy made his strongest bid to kick them out altogether.

Two Mark V tanks came down the road from Würm. One stopped out of range while the other drove forward to Company B's positions. It knocked out one of our light tanks, but a bazooka succeeded in damaging it and forcing it to withdraw. Then the second tank came forward, supported by 15 or 20 infantrymen. Again one of our tanks was hit, the enemy tank was disabled, and the infantrymen were driven back. Late that afternoon, Company B started to move again. Apparently the tank action had discouraged the Germans because most of them had withdrawn. By 6 p.m., Company B was settled on the northwestern high ground outside Beeck. Company A was brought around to the western side of town by infiltrating one squad at a time and was able to move through the streets to the northeastern edge on Company B's right. A few snipers were encountered but they had little fight in them. On December 1, C Troop of the 125th Cavalry came into Beeck to provide defense in depth.

As a result, by December 1, the last counterattacks in Lindern were beaten back, Beeck was safe, and the way was open to continue the attack on Toad Hill in between. At 8 a.m., December 2, the 335th's 2nd Battalion jumped off to complete its mission. The two pillboxes on Toad were still



THE first glimpse of the Siegfried Line was these "dragon's teeth," an anti-tank obstacle, near Geilenkirchen, a few hundred yards from the Dutch frontier.

THIS was the unforgettable scenery of the countryside, the mud and the foxholes that were little lakes.




TEVEREN
PALENBERG
WÜRM RIVER
UBACH
NORTH
WAURICHEN


HATTERATH
RISCHDEN
NIEDERHEIDE
TRIPS
SUGGERATH →
IMMENDORF →
Sgt Chapman
Geilenkirchen
19 November 1944



IT was rolling country and the next hill was almost always the next objective.

ON the hill, a light machine gun crew looked around. Some of the nicer hills had a patch of grass over the mud.





WHEN there was time and a few handy pieces of wood were around, the foxholes were covered against artillery bursts and the rain.

FORWARD artillery observers were the eyes of the batteries.





ANOTHER type of forward observation post, this time in a house instead of a field, operating from a room with a view. A good OP (observation post) was one of the trickiest problems at the front. Some were too good because they were too logical and the enemy was sure to spot them. His artillery would hasten to spoil the view. The idea was always to get one that was close enough to call the shots but not conspicuous enough to draw too much fire. That was the ideal, always sought, seldom found. More often, it was a case of looking out the top floor of a house as long as it was not shot away, after which it was time to move down, if there was time to move. It was not usual to think of artillery and mortarmen so far forward, but OP's were frequently in front of the riflemen's foxholes.



SOMETIMES the artillery was able to use wire communications instead of radio, as here, where wires which were slipped into a German anti-tank ditch were being checked. This was the same ditch that meant so much in the battle of Lindern (Chapter V). Once the ground was safe, the ditch was turned against its makers. In communications, the enemy had a serious advantage over us. His wires were buried underground and permanently installed. In the forward areas, intense shell fire made the laying of any wires a risky and difficult business for us. For the most part, they had to be laid hastily in the open. Shell fragments always cut them. It was seldom that we had such a nice ditch to protect our wires.



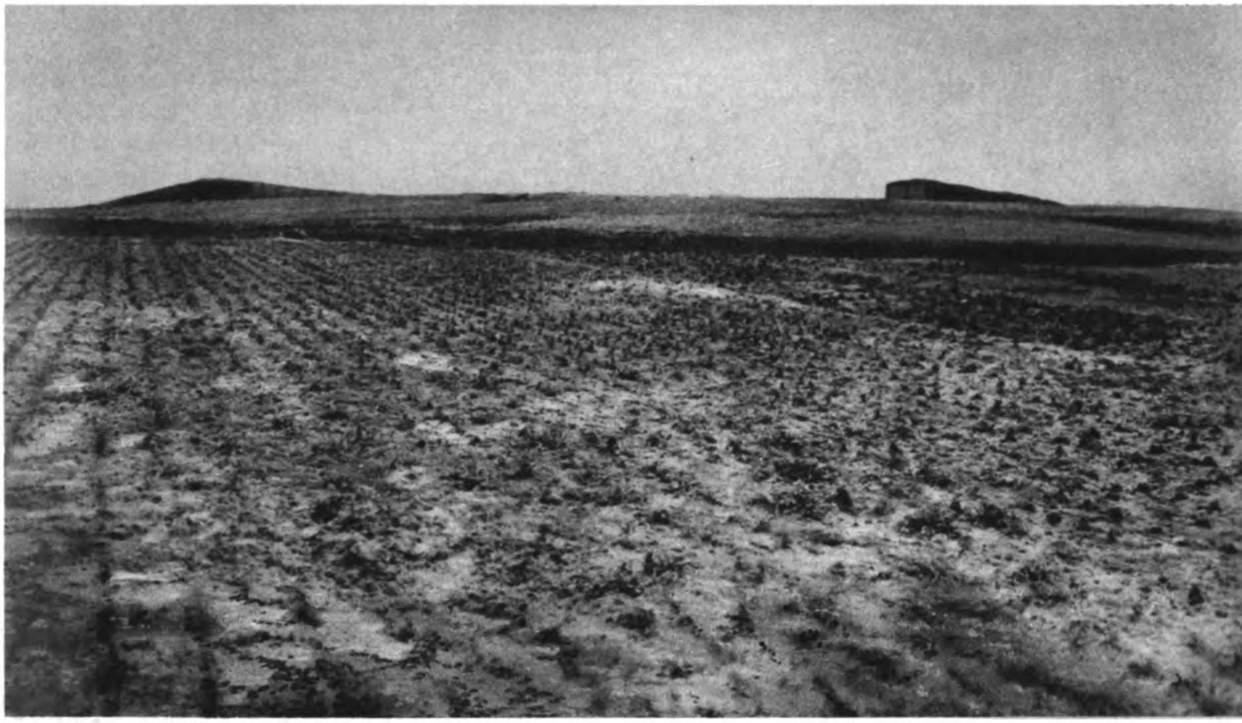
IT was also rare for Signal Company men to get such a nice pole for their maze of wires. Usually they had to lay the wires on the ground or lean them on bushes beside the road. It was a toss-up which was worse: if the wires were hoisted in the air, shell fire was dangerous; on the ground, traffic cut them up. One of the war's more mysterious jobs was checking a break in a wire in such a maze at night.



THE medics might have won easily in any poll of the soldiers' own heroes at the front.

PRISONERS were marched to the rear, hands clasped behind their heads, helmets off.





WHAT pillboxes looked like from a distance to the men who had to assault them.

A GERMAN dugout like this had two or three comfortable rooms inside.





THIS was one of the typical pillboxes which covered the northeastern side of Würm. Like most of them, it was built against the side of a hill. This made them harder to spot but, once they were located, gave them a "blind" side that often enabled our men to creep up undetected. In this case, the pillbox became our OP as soon as it was taken. Later it was blown up to prevent the enemy from using it again under any circumstances. Captured pillboxes were often the only places that our men had to get out of the mud for a while. It may be noticed that this pillbox was hit repeatedly without making a real dent in it. The beet field in the foreground was also typical of this sector.



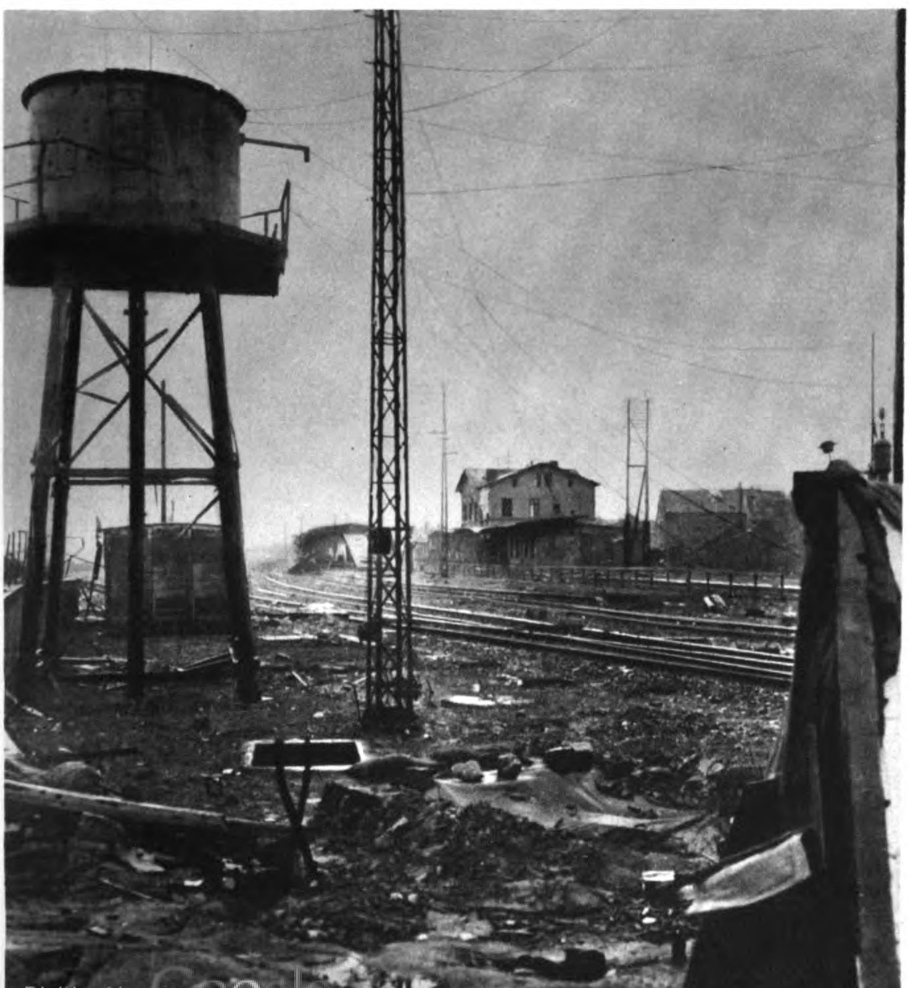
IT was bad tank country but the tankers tried to go forward, the infantry at their heels.

TOO often the mud decided who was going forward.





BY chance, this German soldier was brought to his own home town. He was permitted to visit the ruins of his own house as a psychological preparation for his interrogation.

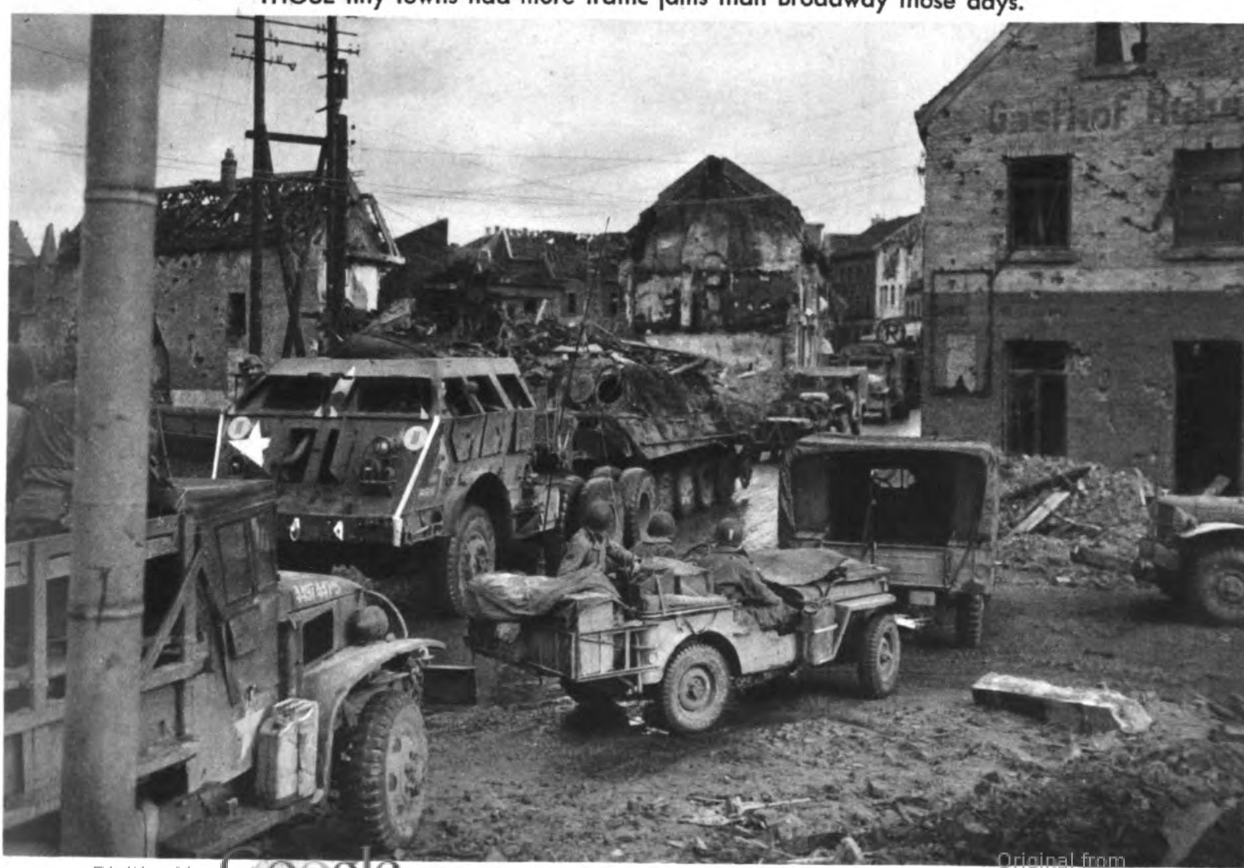


TYPICAL of the railroad stations in this sector, this three-story building in Lindern (in center background) had a deep, roomy, concrete, fortification-like basement. These were planned long before the war to fit into the Siegfried Line.



THIS street in Geilenkirchen could have been any street in any town in the Siegfried Line.

THOSE tiny towns had more traffic jams than Broadway those days.





AN enemy sniper at the top of this church steeple in Gereonsweiler made the town unhealthy for a whole day, but there was enough left of the church to pray in.



THE railroad station in Palenberg was the division's first CP (command post) in Germany. There, for the first time, Red Cross girls in their "clubmobile" handed out coffee and doughnuts only a few short miles from the front.



holding out. Company E knocked out the right one in 15 minutes. Company G had more trouble and took the left one in the afternoon. One of Company G's platoon leaders was shot by a German sniper as he stood on the roof of a pillbox, dropping hand grenades down the ventilators. The capture of the pillboxes gave us possession of Toad Hill.

Toad was the first important victory on December 2. The second was another bloody piece of ground, this time a road.

In the original attack on Lindern on November 29, every time one of our units had to move up the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road, it had to run a gauntlet of enemy fire from the right side of the road around two hills about 1000 yards south of Lindern. On November 30, this strong pocket of resistance was finally eliminated by two 334th battalions which were trying to get to the Linnich-Lindern road. This was the enemy's last route into Linnich from the west and its capture was partly the job of the 84th, partly the job of the 102nd. The 334th Infantry went out to get the upper part of the road nearest Lindern, the 405th Infantry went after the lower part near Linnich (Map 4).

At 7:30 a.m., November 30, the 334th's 2nd Battalion started out of Palenberg to Apweiler. It was heavily shelled but continued on to Gereonsweiler. The 3rd Battalion had the same experience. The 2nd Battalion started up the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road and progressed as far as the two hills when it tangled with two SS companies that were straddling the road at that point. It was necessary to fight all day to dispose of these two companies. The melee was fierce and no holds were barred. About 35 SS men were captured, the rest wiped out. That night, the 2nd Battalion dug in between the two small hills. During the day, the 3rd Battalion had moved up on the 2nd's left and had also taken part in the battle. As a result, the two battalions were thoroughly mixed up and it was not uncommon for some Company F men to find that the neighboring foxholes were occupied by some Company L men.

The next day, December 1, the 2nd Battalion tried to get from its position on the Gereonsweiler-Lindern road to its objective on the Linnich-Lindern road. Company G tried to push forward to locate elements of the 405th Infantry that were supposed to be there but were nowhere to be found. About 200 yards from the Linnich-Lindern road, the enemy let loose a terrific burst of fire from both flanks and Company G had to stop. The terrain was so wide open that reorganization from the previous day's jumble had been very difficult. It was necessary to assign men to squads, platoons, and com-

panies on the spot, irrespective of their previous assignments. That night, the 2nd Battalion dug in short of the Linnich-Lindern road.

By December 2, however, our tremendous effort, not only in this sector but also on the left, in and around Lindern, paid off. When the 2nd Battalion started out again that morning, the enemy was no longer around. Company G, followed by Companies F and E, pushed on across the road and advanced 1000 yards farther to the high ground looking down into Brachelen. Company H's machine gunners had a field day. As they reached the summit of the hill, they spotted an enemy chow line just outside Brachelen and proceeded to shoot it up. With the capture of this high ground, our sector of the Linnich-Lindern road was secure and the town of Lindern itself was sealed off from enemy attacks from the east.

There was still a third victory on December 2. The third was the town of Leiffarth which we now surrounded on two sides, on the east from Lindern, on the south from Toad Hill.

The Battle of Leiffarth

With Beeck and Lindern in our control and the dominating ground between Beeck and Lindern in our hands, too, the enemy's positions in Müllendorf, Würm, and Leiffarth suddenly became precarious. As in most fortified lines, a crack in the structure was very costly, and we had made at least four important cracks. We had the three remaining villages half encircled. For two weeks we had been fighting hard, sometimes savagely, for every objective. Leiffarth was a welcome change.

The mission of capturing the town was given to the 334th's 1st Battalion. The attack was made almost as soon as Toad Hill was secured. The operation was very completely worked out in advance. The plan called for Companies A and B to jump off from the high ground northwest of Leiffarth to assault the town. Company C was ordered to follow closely behind Company A and mop up the town as soon as the leading companies went through it.

But the most important element of the planning was the co-ordination of artillery and infantry. To take maximum advantage of an artillery barrage is one of the most delicate and difficult feats in battle. The artillery will soften up the enemy before the infantry gets in close, perhaps for five minutes or fifteen minutes or, on special occasions such as a river crossing, even a half hour. If the barrage is heavy enough—and ours were—the Germans

may shudder in their foxholes or dugouts and all but lose their minds. Sometimes it may take them so long to recover that our infantry can pounce on them before they get set to put up much of a struggle. But more often, the enemy has simply outwaited the artillery and has come out fighting by the time our infantry has approached them. By that time, the two sides are too close to pour in more shells and the infantry has to take on the job alone. The problem is how to take maximum advantage of the stunning effect of an artillery barrage. The job has to be finished by the infantry but it can be made enormously easier if the enemy is still groggy from the shells.

In Leiffarth, one solution of this problem—a colored smoke shell to indicate the end of a barrage—worked perfectly. When the infantry saw the colored smoke, it knew that there would be no more of our shells in that particular place and it covered the remaining ground at top speed in order not to give the enemy a chance to recover. At noon, December 2, the entire division artillery plus some corps artillery led off with a five-minute preparation. Fires were placed on Leiffarth, on Würm, on the railroad track, particularly on the underpasses which might have afforded shelter for the enemy, on routes by which he could counterattack, and on the buildings and hills north of Leiffarth. It took a lot of guns. At the same time, a white phosphorous smoke screen was laid down by the mortar platoon of the 334th's Company D to block the enemy's view of Leiffarth and the high ground to the south.

At 12:05, the 1st Battalion jumped off. The two assault companies advanced so closely behind the shells that the leading elements seemed caught in the artillery. Enemy resistance was nonexistent. Companies A and B went through Leiffarth 25 minutes after the jump-off. Once in the town, however, two red-green star clusters shot up in the air and heavy enemy artillery fire began to fall on the high ground below Company G. Nevertheless, the leading elements plunged on to the high ground northwest of Leiffarth and started to dig in. The entire operation took 30 minutes. When the enemy's shelling subsided, Company C moved in and mopped up the town.

Holding Leiffarth was more dangerous than taking it. Our supply route to Leiffarth passed through about 2500 yards of open country under constant enemy observation and it was the story of Lindern over again. The railroad behind Leiffarth was an effective barrier to all types of transportation because no road cut across it. As a result, anti-tank guns could not be brought in immediately to guard against enemy counterattacks and, instead, mine fields had to be laid and bazookas sighted at likely avenues of approach.

The expected counterattack was launched by a small group of enemy infantrymen and at least two tanks at 3 a.m., December 3, from the direction of Würm. It was quickly dispersed by our artillery and bazooka fire. Another small counterattack, backed by three or four tanks, was organized the next morning, December 4, but it was also broken up by our artillery before it could get started.

The second phase of our battle in the Siegfried Line was finished. In the first phase, November 18-24, we took Prummern, Geilenkirchen, and Suggerath. In the second phase, November 29-December 2, we took Lindern, Beeck, and Leiffarth. Of the cluster of strong points which was our original objective only Würm and Müllendorf were left. They represented a thin salient into the lines of the 84th Infantry Division and the 43 (British) Division on the left but they were practically untenable. We could afford to take them at our leisure.

By December 2 also, the 102nd had driven into Linnich. Since Linnich was the site for the crossing of the Roer River, the objective of the Ninth United States Army in this sector was accomplished by the combined efforts of three Divisions, 2nd Armored, 84th, and 102nd. They had drilled a hole through the Siegfried Line in 17 days, November 16-December 2. It was a major achievement.

Strange Interlude

Looking back at them, there was something unreal about the first two weeks in December. Our attention was concentrated on one thing, the Germans' on another. We were thinking of crossing the Roer on the way east, the Germans of crossing the Meuse on the way west. As a result, both sides were preparing for different goals in very different sectors of the western front. This play of cross-purposes must be kept in mind to understand the background of the battle in the Ardennes.

There were three rivers which we had to cross in order to get into the heartland of Germany, the Würm, the Roer, and the Rhine. The Würm was a slight stream, the Roer a medium one, and the Rhine a great one. The Würm was no obstacle at all and everyone's hopes and fears were concentrated on the Rhine. In reality, the decisive crossing was the Roer. In practice, the Roer was what the Rhine was supposed to be. Compared with the problems we confronted to get over the Roer, the Rhine was only an incident.

For this there were several reasons. When the Germans planned their defenses, they realized that the defense of the Rhine was possible from a military standpoint but impossible from the industrial one. Mannheim, Coblenz, Bonn, Cologne, Düsseldorf, and Duisburg, to mention only the most important industrial centers, are right on the Rhine. Even before crossing the river itself, our artillery could blast them all to rubble if ever we got close enough to finish what our air force had started. In other words, we did not have to cross the Rhine in order to destroy the great industrial cities which made the Rhineland the main economic basis of the German war machine. We could do enough damage from the western bank.

The Germans were not able to prevent our air force from punishing their Rhine industrial centers, but their ground defense plan was designed to hold off our big guns. The 30 miles from the Roer to the Rhine was broad enough to give them this safety belt. As a result, the main Siegfried Line was west of the Roer; the defenses between the Roer and the Rhine were relatively thin. Nevertheless, we had to fight so hard to get to the Roer that a stop was natural.

Even after we had forced our way to the Roer, however, the enemy had one more trump. The Roer had three dams which gave our strategy-makers more troubled days and sleepless nights than anything else in Germany. The engineers warned that the Germans could flood the Roer countryside and make it impracticable to cross the river "for a considerable period" by blowing up the dams at the right moment. In order to guard against sudden flooding, it was necessary to empty the dams or at least force the water level down below the danger point but this was no easy problem. The Schwammanauel Dam was a massive earth structure which could be destroyed only by the erosive force of water flowing through a gap blown in the dam. To start the flow, the upper dam on the Urft had to be broken. The Schwammanauel Dam had to be filled and the top of it broken to a point below the water level.

The XXIX Tactical Air Command was given the task of blowing up the dam. Three efforts were made, one partially successful, but the flow was not enough to remove the danger of flooding. For one week, December 4-11, the ground forces waited while the bombers went to work. After about 2000 tons of bombs were dropped, the plan was abandoned. The resistance of the dams was the chief reason the Roer crossing was delayed.

We waited but we were not wasting any time. Even before Würm and Müllendorf were cleaned up, the staff began to plan and the troops began to train for the next big operation. Although it was never carried out be-

cause the Ardennes crisis called us away, it represented the division's main activity for the next two weeks.

In general, the division's new mission was a continuation of its old one. Beyond Lindern and Leiffarth, northward, was another triangle, Brachelen-Randerath-Himmerich, which had been the enemy's main assembly area in our sector (Map 2). The reduction of this triangle represented another effort to protect the crossing at Linnich. Otherwise, there was the grave danger that the enemy would hit us a stunning blow in the flank while we were moving eastward. This operation would have involved another attack up the "long axis" of the Siegfried Line, virtually from strong point to strong point. Again we would have to cross open, marshy ground, completely vulnerable to enemy observation, before we could come to grips with his main defense works. The pillboxes, fire trenches, gun emplacements, weapon pits, bunkers, and other installations were at least as numerous as those we had just overcome.

While waiting for the air force to work on the dams, we had time to re-examine the whole problem of assaulting fortified positions. Although we were not able to put most of our knowledge and experience into practice, the results of our efforts were rich and should not be lost.

Men against Concrete

Pillbox warfare, both for attackers and defenders, is still apparently in the experimental stage. We were learning it as we went along, and it is quite obvious that the Germans had not figured out all the answers either.

Many of the pillboxes represented an enormous investment in time, materiel, and manpower. Some were large enough to house 30 men. A typical one had a room to sleep in, a room to live in, and an ammunition room. Smaller pillboxes had two rooms, larger ones four. Steel cupolas were made with as much as 4½-inch steel. By building a shed or a farmhouse over the pillbox, the Germans achieved almost perfect camouflage. It was possible to walk up to a "farmhouse" and turn away without realizing that the flimsy wooden boards covered up a monster of concrete and steel.

And yet, after making this enormous effort, the Germans never quite succeeded in putting the pillboxes to the best advantage. In the first place, by the end of 1944, they did not have the manpower to use the pillboxes properly. They had to economize, and, strangely enough, pillbox warfare was

not necessarily economical. Twenty to forty men may have to be wasted in a single pillbox, and in our sector alone there were more than 100. Since the enemy was not able to afford the luxury of stowing away such large numbers in the pillboxes, he left most of them unoccupied but held a mobile reserve in the rear to rush into them as soon as they came under fire. Sometimes he was able to man the pillboxes in time, but often he was not. Whenever we won the race to the pillboxes, we paid a ridiculously low price for very valuable property.

Nor could the enemy afford to put his worst troops in the pillboxes. A pillbox loses most of its worth unless it is defended to the bitter end. It is precisely when a pillbox is taken under assault that it can do the most good, hand out the most punishment, hold up the most men. If the men in it will stay at their guns in the face of bazookas, tanks, artillery, and even flame throwers, it may have to be taken at an exorbitant cost. But such last-ditch defense demands men of the highest morale. Most German soldiers dreaded the idea of fighting in the pillboxes. In many cases, they preferred to fight from the trenches around the pillboxes and to retreat into the pillbox only as a last resort. Often they gave themselves up from the trenches or they seemed to retreat from the trenches to some position much farther back.

On our part, it was recognized that the keynote in any attack against such elaborate defense works was preparation—preparation in planning and training. Only by finding out exactly what we were going into and by getting each man to know his individual job could assault losses be held down to a minimum. Beginning on December 9, each battalion of the 84th was given special combined infantry-engineer-artillery-tank training in attacking and seizing pillboxes. The most realistic conditions were simulated by utilizing pillboxes actually captured from the Germans a short time ago. Particular emphasis was placed on the problem of communication, one of the thorniest in every action.

Every rifle company was broken down into three assault teams, each composed of two rifle squads and four attached engineers. These teams would operate on a narrow front with the definite mission of taking a selected pillbox. The commander of the assault team had available on call a 155 mm. self-propelled gun and a field artillery battery. He would take a position far enough forward to observe the operation, yet enough to the rear to protect his equipment and enable him to call for the particular weapon that might be most useful at the moment. Experience had shown that a pillbox could be taken and losses held down to minimum by using a limited

number of men who knew their jobs and understood how to use the combined resources of infantry, engineers, armor, and artillery. To use more men simply gave the enemy more targets without increasing effectiveness. There was a premium on skill in pillbox warfare.

Although the capture of pillboxes was primarily an infantry job, the engineers played an important role. In the Siegfried Line, our 309th Engineers (C) Battalion supported the infantry in many ways—"when no one wants it, give it to the engineers"—but two were outstanding. The engineers had to destroy the pillboxes as soon as they were captured to prevent the enemy from reoccupying them, and they had to clear away the mines which were sometimes so thick that a man taking cover from artillery had to be very careful where he fell.

At first, a whole platoon of engineers was sent forward with the leading battalion but this proved unsatisfactory for both. The engineers had to carry almost as much as the infantry, besides two satchel charges weighing 36 pounds. They could not get where the work had to be done because it was impossible to move their heavy equipment under artillery fire. The infantry would slip through the enemy's shelling, but the engineers would come up just in time to get the most punishment. Later, two or three engineers were teamed with 12 to 15 infantrymen. Usually, the engineers would advance as far as the communication trench of the pillbox, perhaps 20-25 yards away, and would place their charges in the aperture once the pillbox was buttoned up. There were times when the engineers had to carry explosives to a captured pillbox under small arms and mortar fire and blow it up with our infantry not more than 500 yards away.

In the Siegfried Line, the Germans were extravagant with their mines, but there were few, at least on the roads, that we could not get to and remove. The worst mine field was encountered on the road from Suggerath to Müllendorf; one engineer rode the leading tank and all he did one day was shoot at mines with his rifle. The most interesting mine road block was also discovered in this same sector. The mines were buried in an asphalt road and covered up so they were not visible. The road had a steel matting as a sub-base and steel rails on each side. The matting and steel rails made our mine sweeping ineffective. The swamps on both sides of the road made detours impossible. The pioneer platoon swept the road for some distance but tanks continued to barge into mines. To play safe, the engineers took about 150 yards of double bangelore torpedoes and set them off that night.

Since the Siegfried Line was possibly the strongest fortified area in the world, the 84th's first month in combat was hard to measure in terms of

days or weeks. There are times when a soldier lives a month in a moment, a year in an hour. There were many moments and hours like that in the Siegfried Line.

Shadow of the Ardennes

We were almost ready to go on the offensive again. The plans were drawn up, the training completed. We had waited for two weeks. But it is always dangerous to underestimate the enemy and this was never more strikingly demonstrated than in those two weeks. While the dams were monopolizing our attention and bad weather was restricting our aerial reconnaissance, the enemy was regrouping his forces for his own offensive, not in the northern sector of the long western front but in the center, in the Ardennes. He was able to take this long chance to thin out his lines just where we were expecting to attack because, for some time at least, he could hide behind a few dams and a river. The immense virtue of this dam defense was, as far as the Germans were concerned, that it did not cost them manpower, an advantage which they were not slow to seize. The first two weeks of December were, therefore, a period of preparation on both sides.

Since the 84th was deeply involved in the offensive preparations on the Roer, it was not directly affected at first by the enemy's offensive in the Ardennes. But it was indirectly affected and its experience was interesting for its reflection of the German strategy.

At 4:30 a.m., December 16, the enemy opened up with artillery and mortar fire against our lines around Leiffarth. At the same time, two German battalions began to infiltrate into our positions under cover of the bombardment. The 2nd Battalion, 694th Volksgrenadiers, was thrown at our 335th's 2nd Battalion between Leiffarth and Lindern, and the 1st Battalion, 343rd Volksgrenadiers, was sent at our 334th's 1st Battalion between Würm and Leiffarth. As long as it was still dark, the enemy succeeded to some extent in slipping into our positions and taking cover inside houses in Leiffarth. As soon as dawn broke, however, the situation was quickly brought under control and the remnants of the attacking force tried to get back to their own lines. As usual, it was much easier to get in than to get out. At about 9:30 our artillery staged one of the neatest plays in its career. Approximately 200 enemy troops were boxed in about 500 yards northeast of Leiffarth where the Germans had their own mine fields. They were forced into their own mine field if they tried to move back or herded into our lines

if they moved forward. Both enemy battalions were shot up within an hour. One battalion commander was killed and his successor captured.

At first the motive of this attack was obscure. Prisoners told us that the action was ordered so hastily that they had only the vaguest notion of the location of their own mine fields or ours. As a result, the enemy's heaviest losses were suffered in their own mine fields, both coming and going. That day's bag of prisoners, more than 70, was unusually bitter.

Fifty miles from us, south, in the Ardennes, that very day, December 16, the Germans launched their biggest offensive in the battle of Western Europe.

The Last Two

From December 16 on, the shadow of the Ardennes offensive grew larger and larger, swallowing all that was happening on every other front. That first day, around Leiffarth, we were involved indirectly. Before we were involved directly, however, we had to attend to some "unfinished business" —Würm and Müllendorf.

In our original plans, the seizure of Würm and Müllendorf was the first step in the larger operation against the Brachelen-Randerath-Himmerich triangle. The larger operation had to be postponed, but not before we were able to carry out the preliminary step.

Würm and Müllendorf were old scores. On November 19, we had captured Geilenkirchen and Suggerath, but were held up in front of Müllendorf. In the next five days, we found out that a frontal attack was unprofitable. In another five days, we began to turn the enemy's position by taking Lindern and Beeck. When we could not get into Würm and Müllendorf through the front door, we were going to force our way in through the back yard.

As at Leiffarth, we gave Würm and Müllendorf special artillery treatment —the amount of good the artillery can do for the infantry is one of the best tests of a fighting machine's maturity. Würm was held by the 2nd Company, 343rd Volksgrenadiers, Müllendorf by the 1st Company, 343rd Volksgrenadiers. The enemy's defense was further strengthened by attached units of the 14th Company, 343rd Volksgrenadiers, and supported by the 2nd Battalion, 219th Artillery Regiment. At 8:55 a.m., December 18, 12 battalions of artillery, a 4.2 mm. chemical mortar company, two 81 mm. mortar platoons, three cannon companies, and other supporting weapons poured a terrific

concentration of fire into Würm. Five minutes later, the barrage was transferred from Würm to Müllendorf and our 334th's 1st Battalion jumped off from Leiffarth to take Würm. Prisoners later testified that our artillery fire was extremely accurate. Its psychological effect in the pillboxes was paralyzing.

By 10 o'clock, one hour later, Companies A and B had advanced through Würm, had reached their final objective, and had begun to organize a defense of their new position. Opposition was generally light. By 10:45 a.m., the occupation of Würm was practically complete.

At the same time, at 10:45 a.m., the 334th's 2nd Battalion moved out of Beeck toward the railroad at Würm, turned southwest at the railroad, and struck at Müllendorf from the rear. Whereas no pillboxes were encountered in Würm, 15 had to be taken around Müllendorf. The first pillbox was attacked at 10:56 a.m. and the last one was captured at 12:50 p.m.—an average of about 7 minutes per pillbox. By 11:30 p.m., Müllendorf was ours.

The Germans tried to stage one small comeback. At 7:45 p.m., that same night, about 80 troops of the Engineers Detachment, 343rd Volksgrenadiers, attempted to stage a counterattack to retake Würm. A few succeeded in infiltrating into our lines, but they were throwing themselves away. Two were captured and the rest wiped out. The whole affair lasted about 20 minutes. The remainder of the night was quiet. Our casualties for both towns were extremely light.

In the records of the division, the struggle from Prummern to Müllendorf was told in six short, simple, unsentimental facts:

"In Germany, the 84th Infantry Division engaged in combat for exactly one month—from 18 November 1944 to 18 December 1944.

"In that month, it captured eight strong points of the Siegfried Line.

"The total number of prisoners taken was: 28 officers, 1521 enlisted men.

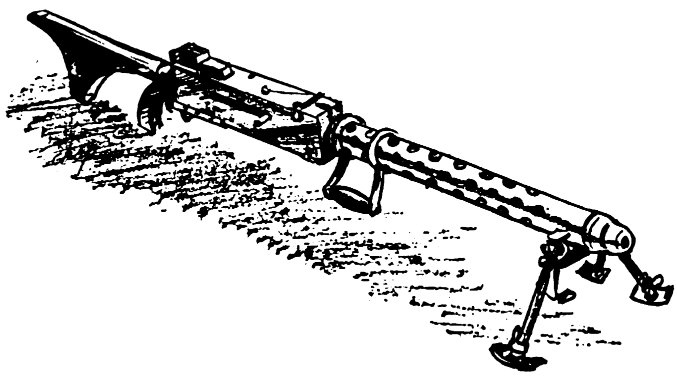
"One hundred and twelve pillboxes were captured or destroyed.

"At least 15 different German units were engaged, including panzer and SS forces.

"Every mission was accomplished."

Part Two

THE ARDENNES



CHAPTER VI

At All Costs

BASICALLY, the German break-throughs of May 10-13, 1940, and December 16-28, 1944, seem very similar. In 1940, the Germans reached the Meuse between Sedan and Dinant, then turned northwest along the Somme River to Abbeville, and boxed in the main Allied forces in Belgium. In 1944, the Germans tried to reach the Meuse between Namur and Liége, then turn northwest along the Albert Canal to Antwerp, and box in the main Allied forces in Holland and Germany. Not that this was necessarily their expectation; it was probably only their fondest hope. But it was perhaps not beyond the realm of possibility and if it had succeeded or had come anywhere near success, it would have been a colossal case of lightning striking twice in the same place.

In 1940, the German attempt was more interesting than the Allied reaction. In 1944, the Allied reaction was more interesting than the German attempt.

In 1940, the French had no forces at all in the Ardennes; they merely tried to rush some in. The Belgians had two divisions of their crack troops, *Chasseurs Ardennais,* and threw them in. The *Chasseurs* were supposed to carry out delaying actions, but delaying was interpreted in a special sense. For the most part, it merely meant demolitions and some halfhearted road blocks. When the Allied command of 1940 thought of the Ardennes, they thought of it as an outpost of the Meuse. The real defense line was the Meuse; the Ardennes was useful only to the extent that some token resistance in the hills and woods would enable the Allied forces to get in position behind the Meuse.

This was the decisive error of 1940 which was not repeated in 1944. For the Ardennes is almost ideal country to defend in. If a strategy of delaying action was at all necessary in 1940, there was no region in western Europe where the enemy could have been forced to pay a higher price for every

yard forward. The entire sector is full of commanding high ground. If the hills and ridge lines are held tenaciously, they must be taken one at a time. They can be taken even if they are held quite stubbornly, as our counteroffensive in January 1945 showed, but each attack must come in force and it must be worked out carefully. There is no easy way of racing through. The Ardennes is essentially a forest, below Rochefort large stretches of forest, above Rochefort one small patch of woods after another. These woods provide almost perfect opportunities for pockets of resistance. They can be cleaned out, but the job requires time and effort. Finally, the region is full of little villages and tiny bits of villages, strategically placed astride the roads.

There is a popular impression that the chief trouble in the Ardennes is the lack of good roads. As anyone on the ground will agree, the Ardennes has a fairly good road system. It is not the lack of roads as much as the lack of cross-country maneuverability that matters. The extremely woody, extremely hilly country makes it necessary to stay largely on the roads even in the best weather, but there are plenty of roads on which to stay. This is where the hills, woods, and tiny villages make themselves felt. If they are defended strenuously, advance along the roads may be difficult and costly. On the other hand, if no advantage is taken of these strong points, it may be possible to advance quite rapidly along the existing road net. It should be remembered, too, that the Germans advanced in 1940 in the best time of year, in the middle of May. But we were able to stage our counteroffensive in the ice and snow of January 1945 when it was even more necessary to stick to the roads.

In December 1944 the Allied command faced essentially the same problem as the Allied command in May 1940. Should we defend in full strength east of the Meuse in the Ardennes or pull back behind the river? The decision of December 1944 was the former. The decision of May 1940 was the latter. History has already passed judgment on the two, but to get the full value of the lesson, it is necessary to ask why.

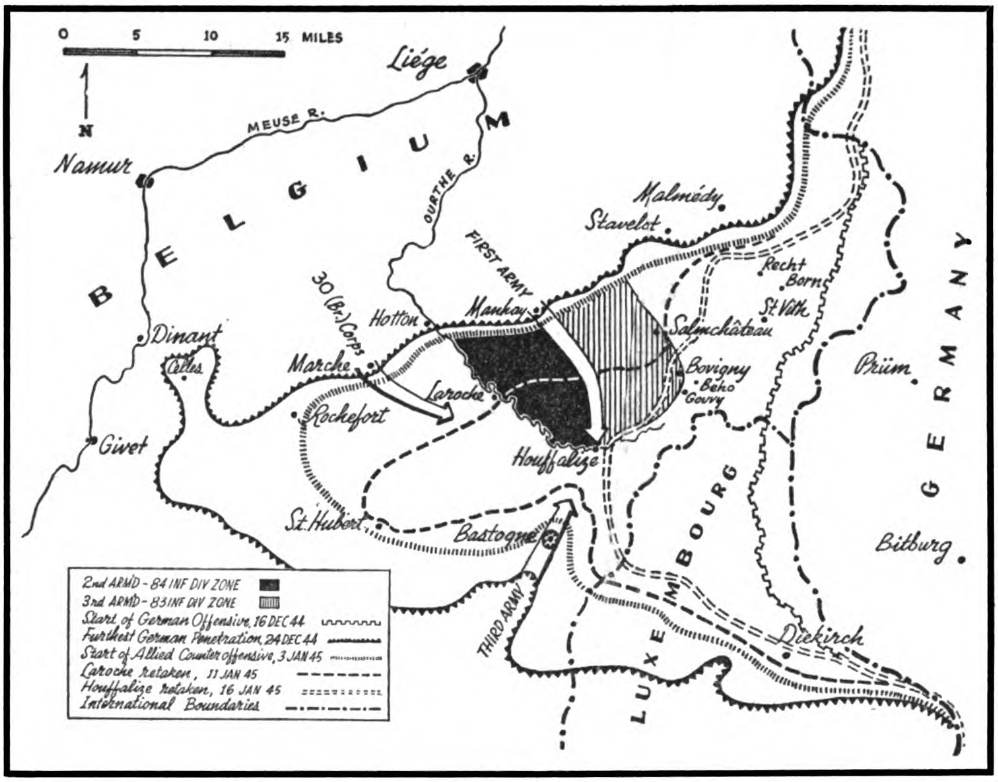
At Malmédy, St. Vith, and Bastogne (Map 6), to name only three of the outstanding places, the Allied defense was magnificent. But some of the other stories may perhaps serve as an even more striking example of the strategic problem as we faced it. American divisions were in or near Malmédy, St. Vith, and Bastogne when the Germans struck. But there was one place which at one time was almost wide open. There may be special significance in what was done there.


Chapman



From Germany to the Ardennes

The German offensive in the Ardennes was launched by two strong panzer armies which represented the last of the enemy's main reserves on the western front. By economizing for months in gasoline, planes, tanks, and materiel of every kind, the Germans had managed to accumulate a store



6. THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

of supplies which was enough to start the drive in grand style, though they probably counted on capturing a good deal of our supplies in order to end it the same way. There were two principal thrusts. In the northern Ardennes, Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army tried to plunge through Malmédy to Liége and, if its success warranted it, to continue as far as Antwerp. The

Meuse was the minimum objective, the North Sea the maximum. In the southern Ardennes, General Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army tried to get to the Meuse between Dinant and Namur. The enemy's rank-and-file were assured that they would go on to Paris, but the commanders were undoubtedly content to protect Dietrich's southern flank.

In the north, the enemy's failure to capture Malmédy was fatal. In the south, the stumbling block was Bastogne. But there was one important difference. Whereas Dietrich had to stop at Malmédy, Manteuffel was able to bypass Bastogne and keep going. In the north, the German drive began to ooze southward as its center of gravity, the Malmédy-Stavelot sector, was stopped up. In the south, however, Bastogne was encircled and, by December 19, strong enemy forces were penetrating between Houffalize and Bastogne, a drive which would have led them to the Meuse between Givet and Namur, instead of between Namur and Liége. Whereas Dietrich was originally supposed to make the main effort, by the fourth or fifth day Manteuffel was making the main effort. When the Germans discovered that they could not break through Malmédy in the north, they invested precious new forces in the assault on Bastogne in the south.

In the sector of greatest danger, the principal road centers were St. Vith, Bastogne, Laroche, and Marche. By December 22, both Laroche and St. Vith were captured and Bastogne was encircled. Only Marche was left in American hands. Unless Marche was held, it seemed very likely that the Germans would roll on to the Meuse.

The Germans were confident that Marche was helpless. The famous demand for surrender, which the Germans dropped on Bastogne on December 22, stated: "The fortune of war is changing. This time the U.S.A. forces in and near Bastogne have been encircled by strong German armored units. More German armored units have crossed the river Our near Ortheuville, have taken Marche, and reached St. Hubert by passing through Homores-Sibret-Tillet." But the Germans were not the only ones who were deceived. As late as January 10, twenty-one days after our 84th Infantry Division went in and held it, Marche was still in German hands in the daily situation map in *Stars and Stripes*, based on the most authoritative information available in Paris.

What actually happened, however, should help to explain how and why the German drive was stopped dead before it reached the Meuse.

The German offensive had opened on December 16. As late as December 18, the 84th was still fighting in the Siegfried Line. It was attached to the Ninth Army whereas the German drive was aimed at the First Army. Yet,

by the 19th, the 84th was preparing to move about 75 miles to the south and by 10 o'clock the next evening, December 20, one of its combat teams, the 334th, was already entering Marche. By the 21st, the entire division was safely settled in and around Marche. The next day, the 84th was attached to the VII Corps, commanded by Major General Lawton C. Collins.

In May 1940 General Corap's IX Army had at least three days to move into position along the Meuse between Sedan and Namur, using first-class roads and a railroad, but a large part of his army never arrived in time—Premier Reynaud claimed that as much as "half" was late, probably an exaggeration, but the percentage, whatever it was, was damaging enough. The speed with which some of our divisions were shifted from one front to another and from one army to another in December 1944 was the real countersurprise to the German command.

The Wide Open Spaces

When the 84th pulled into Marche on December 20-21, it found itself virtually in a vacuum. The only organized force in the vicinity was the 51st Engineer (C) Battalion, which was trying to hold road blocks between Laroche and Hotton and between Champlon and Marche (Map 7). There were also stray but small quartermaster and ordnance units in the vicinity and a Military Government office in Marche itself. The "fog of war" was dense. We did not know, nor could First Army headquarters tell us, what to expect in Marche, where the enemy was, how strong he was, or where and how strong our friendly forces were. It was completely unfamiliar ground, the terrain as unlike the Siegfried Line as possible.

It took some time for the fog to dissolve. The first few hours for the first few 84th men in Marche were somewhat tense.

In every one of the division's major moves, General Bolling had led the advance party himself to look the ground over personally and to make the most important decisions before the arrival of the main body. The Ardennes move was no exception. At 9 a.m. on December 20, General Bolling, Major Hayden C. Jones, assistant G-3, Captain Austin A. O'Malley, assistant G-2, Captain Joseph Walker, the general's aide, and four MP's left Palenburg, Germany, in the general direction of the Ardennes. They stopped at the First Army's headquarters in Verviers, Belgium, tried vainly to find out where the front was and what was expected, but were merely told to assemble the division in the Marche area. This was reassuring because it

indicated that Marche was safe for at least long enough to put the division together again after the long ride. The roads were almost completely deserted all the way down. When the party passed the headquarters of the 82nd Airborne Division, however, soldiers dug in along the road said that they expected that road to be cut by the enemy at any moment.

Once past Hotton, only about 6 miles northeast of Marche, the advance party began to pass crowds of Belgian civilians, their most precious worldly possessions in their hands or on their backs, obviously trying to flee. They were refugees from Marche. The two 84th cars drove into Marche at about 7 p.m. It was already dusk. The atmosphere of panic was irresistible. General Bolling went into a small shop in the main square, asked a few questions, and learned that the Germans' triumphal entry into Marche (for the second time—Rommel led a German division through Marche in May 1940) was considered imminent, that everyone was packing and getting out. In the whole town, only two American soldiers were visible, two First Army MP's.

General Bolling proceeded to the engineer's headquarters, a schoolhouse, and found fewer than ten men there, brave men who had watched others leave. They were overjoyed to see a general but they were wary. "Are you by yourself, sir, or do you have any other forces with you?" one asked. "We have an infantry division on the road," General Bolling answered. "It will come in tonight." The engineers cheered. The tremendous strain which had gripped them for days broke loose. At the Military Government office, also one of the few holdouts, a slightly different drama took place. It was firmly claimed that General Bolling's party could not have come through Hotton because Hotton, they were sure, was held by the enemy. The incident, a tiny but significant example of the vagueness of everyone's information, was a healthy one. It gave General Bolling a vital piece of information—whether or not Hotton had been captured, it was not a safe route for our convoys. Frantic efforts were immediately made to head off our 334th. A call finally got through to the Chief of Staff, First Army, which succeeded in catching the 334th just in time to reroute it farther north.

That same night, German tanks drove up as far as the outskirts of Marche and began to shell the town. Fortunately the enemy was not daring enough. His tanks could have entered Marche ahead of the 334th. Apparently he preferred to shoot up the town that night and enter the next morning. By then, it was too late. Our shortage of men in Marche was so great and the need for speed so desperate that General Bolling directed traffic and deployed the battalions as they came in one by one. He ordered bazooka men forward first. There were several hours on that night of December 20 when

the slightest misfortune might have decided the fate of Marche differently. The German tanks might have entered the town boldly and caught our convoys on the road. A traffic jam or one of a thousand possible accidents might have held up the 334th until it was too late. By morning, one combat team had already dug in and placed its guns and two more were nearing. On December 21, even division headquarters had to be called out to man road blocks in Marche. We also had the 771st Tank Battalion, which joined us for this specific mission but stayed with us for the rest of our combat career.

The job of the MP's on the way down to Marche was unusual, even for a unit that could not be surprised by anything any more. The MP's were given one hour's notice to post the route from Palenberg to Marche. No overlay was available. Fifty miles from Marche, Captain John J. Ridge ran out of men. He had to commandeer a truck load of infantrymen to fill in. The division MP's in Marche found that some First Army MP's still there were ordering all convoys to keep their lights on. The latter did not know that the enemy was only a few kilometers away. Our MP's had to spend the night telling all drivers to turn their lights off. Captain Ridge had to post every MP himself from a map that had been marked on virtually a moment's notice over a route which he had never seen before. He worked for two and a half days without sleep checking and rechecking his men. Some MP's had to pull 48 hours duty without relief on a single can of C rations, a can of tomato juice, and a few doughnuts.

In this atmosphere of melodrama, the fog began to dissolve. We found ourselves right in the path of the 2nd Panzer Division and the 116th Panzer Division with nothing on our left flank, above Hotton, and nothing on our right flank, below Marche. For at least three days, the 84th was an island of resistance, holding back what was momentarily threatening to become a tidal wave of German panzers. It was not until December 24 that the 2nd Armored Division was able to move down between Marche and the Meuse as far as Humain and Buissonville and the 3rd Armored Division was able to connect up with the 84th at Hampteau on the Ourthe.

The big problem those first days was information. If ever a front was "fluid" it was there. The confusion was indescribable. With no friendly troops on our flanks, it was impossible to get neighboring reports of the enemy's movements. In May 1940 Allied units in similar circumstances almost invariably preferred to pull back to "straighten out the line," to "fill in the flanks," or to get behind another river. Instead this time the 84th was ordered to hold the line Marche-Hotton "at all costs."

For a single division, this was a huge order. By December 21, our lines extended generally along the line Hampteau-Menil-Verdenne-Hollogne-Waha-Hassonville-Hogne—a distance of no less than 12 miles (Map 8).

In an attempt to find out what the enemy was massing against us, a large number of motor patrols were sent out on December 21. The 84th Reconnaissance Troop and the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoons of the 334th and 335th tried to cover the front to a depth, if possible, of 5 miles. It was significant that the 5-mile depth was reached in only one of the routes. In every other, the enemy was already blocking the way in force. In every case, the patrols met enemy units of company size moving toward our outpost line. Each of these German columns contained several captured American vehicles, including Sherman tanks. The German tanks were heavily camouflaged. The enemy soldiers were wearing parts of our uniforms and eating captured K-rations. These patrols were lucrative sources of information but we had to pay for it. About half of the 335th's I & R Platoon was captured and several vehicles were lost. Many men had to abandon and destroy their vehicles and make their way back on foot. They straggled in for several days and, though it was hard on them, they enabled us to know what was going on in front of us in the enemy ranks.

The same day, December 21, the 335th's commander, Colonel Hugh C. Parker, after inspecting the terrain, decided to occupy the high ground south of Waha and to establish a strong road block at the intersection south of Hollogne on Highway No. 4, which runs directly from Bastogne through Marche to Namur. He felt that Marche could not be held if the enemy captured this hill or this crossroads because the terrain farther north was much less favorable for defense. This increased our lines by about 2000 yards but it was worth it as the next day proved.

At the other end of our line, at Hotton, the danger was great for 48 hours, but, fortunately, we were again ready by the time our worst fears were realized. On December 20, when General Bolling passed through Hotton, a few engineers and a handful of other American soldiers were "holding" the town. The engineers were prepared to blow the bridge over the Ourthe and momentarily expected to have to do so. Nevertheless, the reports in Marche that Hotton was already lost were premature. The next morning, December 21, a platoon of tanks were sent "to see what was going on." They found the bridge intact, much to their surprise. The rest of the day was quiet. On the third day, December 22, the German attack came. The most interesting feature was the duel between the enemy's tanks and our tank destroyers.

Company B's 1st Platoon, 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was guarding the bridge and vital crossroads in the town. On the morning of December 22, a German tank, which apparently had slipped into town in the dark, was spotted. This tank was covering the main road into Hotton, but the TD's could not fire on it because some buildings blocked the way. The TD's pulled up on the hill overlooking the town and opened up on the tank; three hits were scored frontally, but the tank could not be knocked out. The tank fired back and the TD's withdrew.

Next, a second tank was observed in Hotton. Lt. Charles F. Bryson decided to find out just how much the enemy had in the town before making another move. A patrol saw five German tanks, one half-track, and one tank dozer, not more than 50 yards apart. The TD's maneuvered into position to shoot up the area. Two TD's opened up on the leading tank. Four hits exploded the tank's "ammo." It went up in flames. Two more hits on the second tank, three hits on the third tank, and two more hits on the fourth tank blew them up in a burst of fire. The fifth tank was hit four times but only the track was broken and it continued to return our fire. The half-track, however, was knocked out. This entire action took place at a range of 800-900 yards. It was one of the clearest TD victories in our experience. Hotton was saved.

The second German attempt to break through our lines came at 3 p.m. on the afternoon of December 23, at the very road junction south of Hollogne which the 335th's Company E was holding as a result of the reconnaissance the day before. The road junction was hastily fortified with "daisy chains" and logs, covered by anti-tank guns, bazookas, and automatic weapons. A German column, belonging to the 116th Panzer Division, headed by an American M-8 armored car and a Mark VI tank, came right up Highway No. 4. By an odd coincidence, just as the tip of the German column came within range of our guns, elements of the 3rd Armored Division, which had been ordered to establish road blocks on Highway No. 4 approximately 10 miles south of us, were passing through us to their destination.

Lt. Richard Mullin, artillery forward observer, immediately called for the fire of his battalion, the 909th FA, and adjusted it on the head of the column in an area in which the artillery had not yet even registered. The Mark VI tried to turn around and get away, lost a track, and our bazookas knocked it out. Our tanks added to the enemy's embarrassment. Apparently the German tankers were upset because they blew down a large tree across the road in front of them, adding to their confusion. All through the night

of December 23-24, the enemy made repeated attempts to infiltrate through the gaps which existed in the 6000 yard front that this battalion, the 335th's 2nd, was covering alone. We fired continuously, especially artillery and mortars. The next morning, December 24, the woods were searched and found full of dead and wounded Germans. The live ones did not give up trying but the lines never budged.

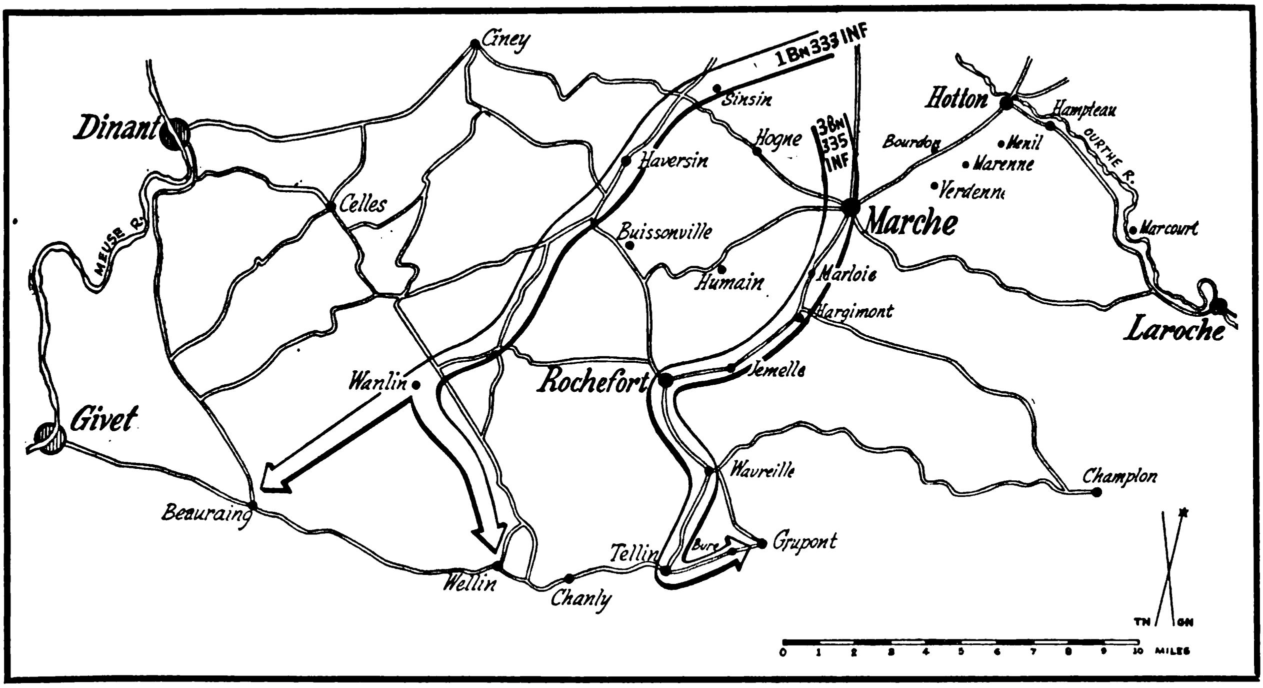
How to Look for Trouble

The position around Marche was uncertain enough, but we could cut through the confusion only by plunging even further into the uncertainty. We were getting our own sector under control, but our flanks were still dangerously obscure. On December 22, two battalions were sent out far beyond Marche to organize a "counter-reconnaissance screen." The 335th's 3rd Battalion went as far as Tellin, about 11 miles southwest of Marche. The 333rd's 1st Battalion went as far as Wanlin, about 14 miles west of Marche. If we came in without information, we were going out to get some. If we had nothing on our flanks, we were going to send something out. We were going to try to block the roads to Rochefort and Marche, if for nothing else, in order to buy precious time.

If the division was out on a limb, those two battalions went out on the branches. The areas were so large that each battalion had to split up into companies which operated more or less independently, and at least one company had to split up into more or less independent platoons.

As for the 335th's 3rd Battalion, Company I managed to get to Rochefort on the afternoon of December 22. Company L was supposed to go to Hargimont but it ran into heavy resistance at Marloie and could not move any farther. The remainder of the Battalion went to Rochefort by way of Hogne, Sinsin, and Haversin to look the ground over to the north and west. At Rochefort, Company K was sent to establish road blocks at Grupont and Tellin, two small villages astride the approaches to Rochefort. Two platoons were dropped off in Tellin and two platoons tried to get to Grupont (Map 7).

This battalion was now excellently placed to find out where the Germans were. They were all around. By December 23, Company L at Marloie was cut off by enemy forces between Marloie and Rochefort. Late that afternoon, German tanks and infantry started to come into Rochefort. The 2nd Armored Division was coming down toward Rochefort but, for a day, the



7. THE COUNTER-RECONNAISSANCE SCREEN

335th's 3rd Battalion was all we had in the way of the 2nd Panzer Division which was racing to a collision with our 2nd Armored.

Company K was out on the leaves of the furthest branch. As the 1st and 2nd Platoons were moving from Tellin to Grupont, just as they passed the village of Bure in between, the leading jeep was fired on. A civilian volunteered the information that there were nine Germans and a half-track in Grupont. The 1st Platoon went off to Grupont. A German tank rumbled into Bure from Grupont and fired point-blank at the temporary CP. At one point, the company commander, Lt. Leonard R. Carpenter, found himself entirely alone in a house in Bure. When three SS men came in to search the premises, he dived into a potato bin in the cellar, grimly holding on to a 300 radio. After the SS men left empty-handed, he worked on the radio and broke into a conversation which hinted that his two platoons were still in Tellin. With the help of a Belgian civilian—civilians practically saved the company—he found a backwoods trail to Tellin.

At 8:30 that night, December 23, Company K was ordered to return to Rochefort. There was no way of relaying the information to the 1st Platoon

which had gone off to Grupont. The rest tumbled into 2-ton trucks and started back. Outside Rochefort, they found it healthier to proceed on foot. The town was receiving a terrific shelling. In Rochefort, the action was pell-mell. The enemy had infiltrated in force and held most of the houses. Company K moved into a large hotel with Company I. Throughout the night, German 88's, machine guns, and burp guns whistled and rattled all over the town. We had two 57 mm. anti-tank guns and two heavy machine guns in front of the hotel. The next morning, December 24, a German tank came down the street and fired point-blank at the hotel, knocking out several jeeps. A tree-burst of 88's landed on the anti-tank guns. By 9:30 the battalion was ordered to leave Rochefort, but only Company M and battalion headquarters were able to entruck.

Our men in the hotel decided to make a break for it. To cover their movement, they hurled smoke grenades into the middle of the street, blinding a German tank which was waiting for them. They started out the door in a dead run and headed for the railroad tracks to the north of Rochefort. A thousand yards down the tracks, they came to a wooded area. There Lt. Carpenter found he had two-thirds of Company K, half of Company I, and a few men from every unit that had ever been in the vicinity.

Company M and battalion headquarters reached Givet at 1 o'clock in the morning, December 25. From Givet, the trucks went back and luckily found Lt. Carpenter's men on the road. The remainder of Company I ran into elements of the 2nd Armored Division north of Jemelle and came back directly to Marche. Company K's 1st Platoon stumbled across some engineers at Chanly who brought them in trucks to Givet. Company L was relieved at Marloie the same day. Those who made the trip from Givet to Marche were constantly receiving reports that Marche had been taken by the enemy. As a result, they went as far north as St. Trond in a big circle. They traveled about 125 miles in 36 hours instead of one-fifth the time and distance by direct route. The whole battalion was back in Marche by noon, December 26.

The efforts of the 333rd's 1st Battalion were somewhat similar. On the morning of December 23, Company B was put out in Wellin, Company C in Beauraing, and Company A remained in Wanlin (Map 7). These towns were held until 11 o'clock that night when the battalion received orders to come back. When it received word that the Germans had taken Ciney, midway between Marche and Dinant, it too had to make an enormous circle to get back, going as far north as Namur and Ohey. If the entire

column had not turned around in place on a narrow road, it would have twice run into the 2nd Panzer which was coming through in force and had tangled with our 2nd Armored.

What did we accomplish? These efforts to block the enemy south of Marche served to delay his advance from Rochefort to the Meuse and to give valuable information of the enemy's strength in this sector and the direction of his thrusts. It may also have served to deflect the enemy's pressure from Marche itself until we were ready to meet it and to give the 2nd Armored Division, which was coming down below Marche, time to get set.

But perhaps the most interesting thing about this action was the attitude behind it. It was conceivable that the division might have decided to sit tight around Marche, waiting for the Germans to come up. Apparently, by December 22, the enemy had decided that Marche itself was too strongly held and preferred to go around Marche to the south. The Germans did get as far as 4 miles or so from Dinant and the possible threat of encirclement of Marche was temporarily acute. But, from almost the first moment, the whole conception of holding the Marche-Hotton area was aggressive. Our battalion did not hold Rochefort, but as early as December 22 it did prevent the Germans from getting the idea that there was nothing in their way.

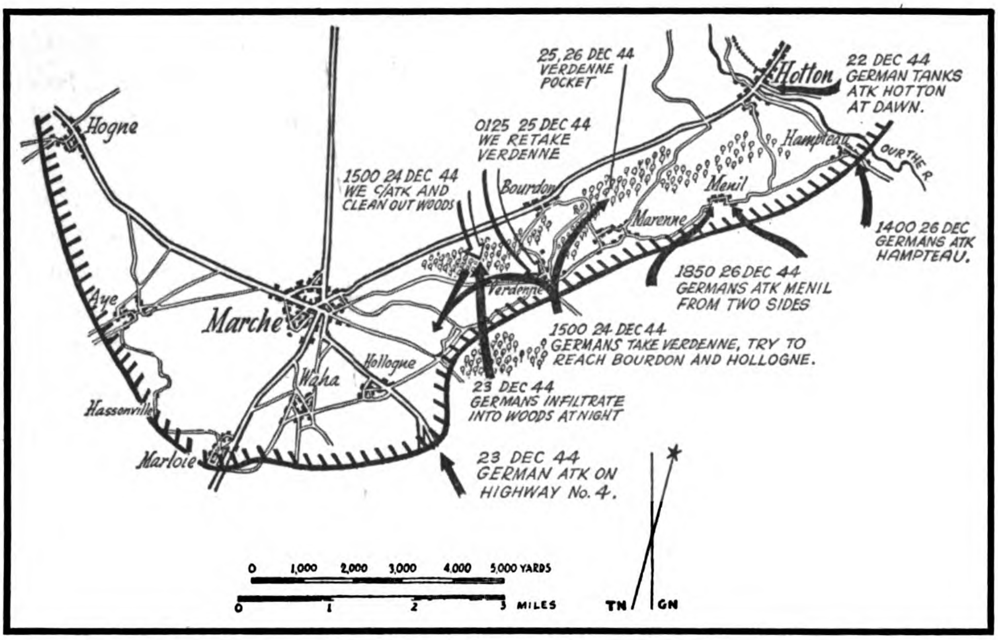
The Battle of Verdenne

By December 24, the fog had lifted for both sides, the 84th was dug in in front of and at both sides of the Marche-Hotton road. Its flanks had been filled in, the 2nd Armored on the right, the 3rd Armored on the left. The 2nd Panzer had twisted south of Marche, penetrating between Rochefort and Hargimont (Map 7). In a series of great tank battles around Celles, it was badly battered by our 2nd Armored. It was now the turn of the 84th. The 116th Panzer Division, a first-rate outfit, tried to crack the very center of our line. Fortunately, it did not try until we had a line and more artillery support. The 193rd Field Artillery was attached. The VII Corps Artillery was rapidly taking up positions to support its divisions.

In the center of our positions was a triangle of villages, Verdenne, Marenne, and Bourdon, the latter about a mile in back of the other two (Map 8). Bourdon was the main objective because it cut the Marche-

Hotton road in half. The village which bore the brunt of the enemy's attack, however, was Verdenne because it was the door to Bourdon.

The 334th's 3rd Battalion was set up from a crossroad near Champlon to the village of Menil, a distance of about 5 miles, Company I on the right, Company L on the left, Company K in reserve, and Company M in support. On the night of December 23, an enemy force estimated at two reconnaissance companies succeeded in infiltrating behind Company I's position into a woods about a half mile west of Verdenne.



8. THE ARDENNES: DEFENSIVE PHASE

At 3 o'clock the next afternoon, December 24, the battle of Verdenne broke out. Strangely, we had chosen that very moment to launch our counterattack on the enemy pocket behind Company I and the enemy had also chosen that moment to attack Verdenne. His plan was to hit Verdenne from the rear with the force in the woods and to hit it frontally at the same time with approximately the same strength. As a result of our counterattack on the woods, however, only half his plan came off.

At 3 p.m., we sent the 334th's Company K and two tank platoons of the 771st's Company B, followed by the 334th's Company A, to clean out the

woods. The Germans had already reached the edge of the woods, intent on their own attack, when our tanks opened fire on them. Meanwhile, our infantry closed in. The German attack was completely broken up and the enemy tried vainly to flee.

But the other half of the German attack, the frontal assault on Verdenne, was temporarily successful. An enemy force of five Mark V tanks, two half-tracks, an armored car, and about 100 infantrymen drove into Verdenne and continued to move forward as far as a chateau about 200 yards north of the village. A side show of this attack was less effective. In this same action, while one enemy force broke through to Verdenne, another tried to get into Hollogne from the rear. At first our lines gave way, but our 81 mm. mortars caught the enemy in a defile and this force was annihilated. In any case, the more important break-through at Verdenne was dangerous enough. That night, December 24-25, the enemy was reinforcing his units in Verdenne and pushing a deep salient into the woods between Verdenne and Bourdon.

Again we had to counterattack. We knew that the enemy was again in Verdenne but the enemy's salient beyond Verdenne was discovered in a curious way. The 333rd's Companies K and L, advancing in that order, were sent out of Marche on the night of December 24 to retake Verdenne. By 9:15 p.m., they arrived at Bourdon. The attack on Verdenne was set for midnight. Outside Bourdon, however, Company K took a left turn, instead of a right. On the road which ran into Verdenne from the northeast, the head of the column ran into six or eight tanks and an armored car. In the dead of night, it was impossible to be sure of anything but that they were tanks.

Company K's commander, Lt. Harold P. Leimbaugh, had been expecting tank support and, therefore, assumed that the tanks were friendly. He sent up his communications sergeant, Sgt. Donald Phelps, to tell the tankers that the infantry was moving through. Phelps went up to the lead tank, saw a form leaning out of the turret and yelled at it. The form replied, "Halt!" The sound was German. Phelps shot him. The German screamed so hard that Company K's men farther back also grasped the situation, dispersed, and began to fire at the tanks.

At this, the tanks started their motors and fired back, first with their machine guns, then their big guns. An equal number of casualties was probably inflicted on both sides. When the fire fight began, so close were some Company K men to the tanks that one of them, Pfc. John B. Cole, hit the ground and actually rolled under a German tank for protection. He

started to crawl out when he heard Lt. Leimbaugh's voice, requesting five litter-bearers, over the tank's radio. He rose to his feet and started for the tank when the voices changed to German. In time, he realized that the enemy had some American vehicles and was cutting in on a radio message.

In the dark, the situation was muddled for both sides. Company K was ordered to check its position and it pulled back. The action, as far as it was concerned, was broken off. Nevertheless, the tussle revealed just where the German strength was.

As soon as the German position was sized up, a matter of minutes, a second attack was launched at Verdenne, this time by the 333rd's Company L and the 334th's Company K, the latter down to approximately 40 men. It was now 1 a.m., December 25, Christmas morning. Our attack was introduced by a heavy artillery and mortar barrage.

While the shelling was still going strong, Company L entered Verdenne. The first two platoons to go in were temporarily outnumbered and found themselves engaged from three sides. One enemy tank began to move in close. A rifleman, S/Sgt. Edward T. Reineke, took careful aim, chose the tank commander as his target, and killed him. The tank stopped, Reineke ran toward it, jumped, dropped a grenade into the turret, and finished the job by himself. This one-man victory turned the tide. The two platoons swept through the town and dug in on the opposite side while the rest moved in to mop up. It was still dark and many Germans were left. Another enemy tank showed up and terrorized the town until daylight.

Mopping up that day, December 25, was dangerous and tedious. It was necessary to enter every room of every house and barn. Grenades and rifles popped away constantly. The feature of the day was a tank battle in which the 771st's Company B claimed a perfect score. At noon, two German tanks came out of the woods south of Verdenne and approached within 900 yards. Company B's tanks, which had come into town at daylight, got one and began to work on the other. At this, seven more tanks, identified as Panthers, were spotted, heading for Verdenne in a staggered formation. After an hour's fire fight, Company B reported all of them had been knocked out, making a total of nine. Later that evening, however, in the woods north of Verdenne, one of our tanks was knocked out and two others were disabled in a mine field. Apart from the tank encounters, Christmas day in Verdenne was a dragnet for prisoners. Company I alone turned in 300. Many Germans were killed resisting capture. By no means was the fight beaten out of them yet, for Company L remained in Verdenne and had to withstand five enemy counterattacks in four days, December 25-29.

After we retook Verdenne, however, the biggest job was still ahead. With the town retaken, the salient between Verdenne and Bourdon became a pocket of enemy resistance. This pocket was approximately 800 yards long and 300 yards wide in a woods midway between Verdenne and Bourdon. In it were five enemy tanks and an estimated force of two infantry companies. It is interesting to note that the shallow dish-shape of the pocket made it impossible for direct fire weapons to get up to the lip of the dish for aimed shots. All day, December 26, was spent on our part in efforts to eliminate the pocket and on the enemy's part to break through and relieve it.

First we tried. At 3:30 in the morning, December 26, Companies A and B, 333rd Infantry, attacked the pocket but met strong tank fire and withdrew. At 7:05 that same morning, the enemy sent over very heavy artillery fire, followed up by an infantry-tank force. All of our available artillery was immediately concentrated on this attack and broke it up. At 8 o'clock, they tried again, this time penetrating our lines approximately 100 yards, and four more tanks broke through to join the five already in the pocket. By 9:45, however, our original lines were restored and we turned our full attention to the pocket.

Our artillery had been requesting permission to fire into the pocket and particularly wanted to use 8-inch howitzers, the heaviest and yet the most accurate weapons available. Permission was withheld for several hours because our troops completely surrounded the pocket, but, when the number of enemy tanks rose to nine, permission was reluctantly granted—"provided the artillery commander was certain that no doughboy would be hit."

The initial data for the artillery assault were computed with the finest precision. An artillery observer worked his way to a point from which he could see into the pocket. Back at the fire direction center, his first report was awaited breathlessly. The first round was in the pocket and that relieved the pressure, because the first round is the only one whose point of impact cannot be predicted with substantial accuracy. Small adjustments were made, several rounds fired, and two of the tanks were burning.

A half hour later, a battalion of 8-inch howitzers and one of 155 mm. howitzers fired a total of 180 rounds into the pocket—the lighter calibers were not used because their explosive charge had only a nuisance value against a tank. Four more of the tanks were knocked out. An assault by the units surrounding the pocket was timed to follow the concentration but the remaining German tanks and infantry were not yet ready to give up. At 10:15 that night, still the 26th, another desperate effort was made to

wriggle out of the pocket, but the Germans lost three more tanks without anything to show for them.

At the end of December 26, then, our lines in front of Verdenne were stabilized, and we had punished the enemy's troops and tanks in the pocket, but we were not yet sure that it was completely clear. Only on the following night, December 27, was it possible to send a patrol in to investigate. It reported back that the pocket had vanished. Actually, this enemy pocket between Verdenne and Bourdon, the main threat to our position, was a matter of history by the night of December 26 and our front was quiet by the next night.

From Hampteau to Marenne

December 26 was a four-ring circus day. So far we have been looking at only one of the rings—the Verdenne pocket. It was the most dangerous because the Germans had to break through our lines at Verdenne to get into the pocket, but they made equally strong efforts to break through at Marenne, at Menil, and Hampteau. To some extent, it may be false to give the impression that the fighting was restricted to a few small villages. The enemy was testing our entire line in force and the villages were so close that the fighting was very general. An enemy tank started out to attack one place, met too much resistance, and turned around to attack another. Nevertheless, the villages tended to control the roads, the roads were the most vital objectives, and so they became the focal points of the attacks.

The first enemy attack was met at Hampteau. As early as the night of December 21, a patrol of the 334th's Company E had pushed into Hampteau from Menil and had found about 50 engineers of the 3rd Armored Division wearing the only familiar uniforms. The next day, December 22, a platoon of the 334th's Company G took over the town. On the night of December 24, a German half-track tried to get into Hampteau from the southeast and was knocked out by an anti-tank gun, but apparently the report came back to the German commander that the place was very lightly held. That report was correct as far as it went but, on the morning of December 25, the rest of Company G moved in, none too soon. The second feeler came on the night of December 25. Three enemy jeeps came down the same road. The first one hit a daisy chain. A rifle grenade hit the second and stopped it for a bazooka which finished it off. The third turned around and got away. The third and last feeler came the next morning, December 26. It was a

reconnaissance in force by a 50-man patrol. The outposts were instructed not to fire until ordered to do so because the enemy had to round a bend in the road where an ambush was possible. The BAR man was new, nervous, and trigger happy. He let go before the whole patrol had passed the bend. The bazooka man had to open up too, and though one of his rounds wounded two German soldiers, the rest fled.

Meanwhile, an Austrian soldier had wandered into Company E's headquarters at Menil. He was anxious to talk. He revealed that the Germans were planning to stage a co-ordinated attack along the Menil-Hampteau front. One force was going to jump off at 2 p.m. that same day to take Hampteau and the high ground to the north. Next, it was going to use its fire power to support a second force which would jump off later to take Menil, cut the Marche-Hotton road, seize the bridge across the Ourthe, and attack Hotton from the rear. It turned out that the Austrian knew what he was talking about. In our experience, it always paid to listen to prisoners and to listen to them immediately before it was possible to subject them to a formal interrogation.

At 2 p.m., the expected attack came. A company of German infantry began to infiltrate through some hedgerows in front of Company G's 1st Platoon. Unfortunately, the 2nd Platoon was unable to help out because the 1st was in its line of fire. The 1st Platoon had to pull back about 100 yards and one of our mortars was overrun, but a section of tank destroyers held off the attack until both platoons could maneuver into more favorable positions. By 4:30 in the afternoon, the enemy's attack was beaten off, though it was not until that night that a patrol was able to make sure that the Germans had pulled out altogether. Although the position in Hampteau was delicate for a few hours, our resistance had been so stubbornly effective that the Germans left their wounded behind.

The next part of the German strategy also came off on schedule. At 6:30 that evening, Menil was threatened from both sides. The town was held by the 333rd's Company I and one platoon of the 334th's Company E. Company E's other two platoons were spread out east of the town between Menil and Hampteau. The 333rd's Company M guarded the western approach to the town between Menil and Marenne.

One strong enemy force, including eight tanks, ten half-tracks, one U.S. jeep, and about 80 infantrymen came up the road from Marenne. As it approached Menil, it ran into a daisy chain of mines and had to leave the road. The trapped Germans drove right into the positions of the 333rd's Company I and Company M. The enemy infantry tried to flee back to

their own lines in the woods east of Menil. Three battalions of artillery were fired at the disorganized infantrymen, while the vehicles were destroyed in the open field. By 7 o'clock, the action was over. Twenty-five vehicles, including six tanks, were knocked out. On the other side of Menil, from the direction of Hampteau, an enemy force estimated at one or two companies had to cross about 500 yards of open ground to get to our lines. Our artillery was called down on them immediately. In the next two hours, the 326th FA Battalion fired 760 rounds from each of its batteries. The attack was smashed so completely that at one time the 334th's Company E alone had 40 wounded Germans in its aid station and 65 prisoners on its hands. The artillery did the big job, yet the Germans moved so fast at the start that the forward artillery observer found himself calling for artillery only 50 yards from our own foxholes.

December 26 was the most exciting day, the most profitable day, and the last day in which the fighting was large scale in the defensive phase. The failure of all the efforts to break through the Marche-Hotton road was, in effect, Manteuffel's last gasp. The German drive to the Meuse was finished. In the end, Hitler—for the Ardennes offensive was his personal pet—had driven some of his best divisions into a big bag. At the tip of the bag was Marche. A week later, we were going to squeeze it and jam them back.

It is clear that the artillery's contribution in the defensive phase in the Ardennes was enormous. There was not a single action in which it did not play a key role, an indispensable role, and, sometimes, a dominating role. In the opinion of the 84th Division Artillery commander, Brigadier General Charles J. Barrett, the first week in the Ardennes was the most remunerative single week in the history of the division artillery. We had 60 guns of our own, organic or attached; 18 more from the armored artillery of Task Force Doan, which was attached to us; and 72 guns of the VII Corps Artillery, which supported us almost exclusively because we were the only division on the spot for a time.

The fire of almost all of these 150 guns—except for certain of the heavier ones which had to be kept stationary to protect certain approaches into our wide sector—was maneuvered nightly as an offensive force in a defensive situation. These guns attacked enemy command posts and bivouac areas, cut his communications, interfered with his reliefs, delayed his supplies, and hammered away at his nerves until his morale was shattered. Daily, likely targets were selected by map study, by air observation, by prisoner interrogation, by forward observers, by the combination of every form of intelligence.

During the night, these targets were hit by surprise fire in irregular order and at varying time intervals, though an average of three concentrations per hour was fired. All rounds on a target were timed to arrive at the same instant, thus magnifying the results, because men not wounded by the first rounds of a series can often take shelter from succeeding rounds—an escape not possible when all of the shells arrive together. The German prisoners showed the terror of the shock shelling even when they were questioned in the comparative safety of an IPW (Interrogation of Prisoners of War) room.

Post-Mortem: Defensive Phase

Such was the skeleton of the defensive phase of the battle of the Ardennes. It can be studied for a long time with profit. Everyone who was in it again learned the old lesson that the way to hold is to hold.

The strategic lesson may be less obvious. The Meuse and the Ardennes are tied together in a single, strategic knot. In 1914 and in 1940, the Meuse was considered the "natural" defense position. No real preparations were made to fight in the Ardennes and, as a result, the Allies were slaughtered in these hills and woods in 1914, or they were not slaughtered in 1940 because they were practically not there. The Ardennes was considered such a formidable natural position that they were counted on to hold up the enemy virtually by themselves. This calculation was tragic both times. By 1940, military engineering had made such advances that it was fatuous.

May 1940 and December 1944 were two sides of the same coin. May 1940 showed that the Meuse could not be held if the Ardennes were not held. This was the fatal mistake which Gamelin—and Pétain who inspired the whole *équipe* of 1940—made. December 1944 showed that it was possible to hold the Ardennes, that in fact its defensive possibilities were immense. A week later, we were going to learn the same lesson when the Germans were on the defensive.

To hold the Ardennes, then, is to hold the Meuse, and there may be no other way. At St. Vith, at Bastogne, at Marche, this was demonstrated for the first time. We may be too close to these battles to see them fully but we are perhaps not too close to see what they mean.

CHAPTER VII

The Battle of the Bulge

If we did nothing else in the Ardennes, we destroyed a couple of myths. First we destroyed the myth that the Meuse and not the Ardennes was the natural defensive position. Then we had to destroy the myth that it was impossible to launch a large offensive in the Ardennes because it was impenetrable.

The Germans began the second demonstration in 1940 but their feat, impressive as it was, was too one-sided to decide anything. They proved it was possible to go through the Ardennes but they did not prove it was possible to fight their way through. They met real opposition only twice and both times in clearings for a few hours. Above all, the Germans carefully chose the very best time of the year, in May, as if to emphasize that special conditions were necessary. In January 1945 we had to fight for practically every hill, wood, village, and road, in the very worst time of the year, in ice as slick as grease and snow waist high, against skillful and stubborn opposition.

The classic offensive campaign of the Ardennes has been fought and we fought it.

The Big Picture Again

The Ardennes campaign may be a hard one to tell about. Every great battle has to be pieced together, but in this one the pieces are peculiarly jumbled.

The terrain in the Ardennes is like a jigsaw puzzle. Somehow all of it fits together but somehow all of it can be taken apart and the pieces fall into the oddest shapes. Each hill and woods is like a separate segment and tactically each one becomes a distinct problem.

In the rolling country, there is commanding high ground almost every mile so that an overnight withdrawal from one hill to the next is relatively

easy. The villages and fragments of villages—the toughest "village" to take in our offensive had a single house—are invariably placed astride the roads and inevitably become enemy strong points. The woods might have been planned by a master strategist to hold pockets of resistance. A continuous line is impossible. Strong points and pockets of resistance are everything. That is why the battle had such a cut-up, piecemeal character.

The German bulge was hit from three sides (Map 6). The Third Army came up from the south, from Bastogne. The First Army came down from the north, from both sides of Manhay. The 30 (British) Corps attacked from the west, from Marche. For us the switch from defensive to offensive was a fine problem in logistics. On January 1, 1945, the 53 (British) Division began to take over the sector of the 84th Infantry Division while we moved farther north. In the VII Corps' sector, four divisions were involved in the drive—the 84th and 83rd Infantry Divisions and the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions. All four had to carry out a complex, eastward sideslipping movement simultaneously on icy, narrow roads, a movement all the more complicated and difficult because two armored divisions were involved. Yet the switch was made amazingly fast. The 84th completed its relief and concentration in its new zone in less than 36 hours.

To get the whole story of the offensive, at least three large phases have to be covered—the Third Army, the First Army, and the 30 (British) Corps —but the main effort was made by the First Army from the north. The Third Army did not make much progress from the south until the First Army's pressure became irresistible. The 53 (British) Division was stalled at the most difficult stage of the drive.

In the First Army, the action was conceived as an armor-infantry job—the 84th Infantry Division was teamed with the 2nd Armored, the 83rd with the 3rd Armored. The main effort, however, was assigned to the 2nd Armored and 84th Infantry Divisions—both Laroche and Houffalize were in their zone of advance.

This offensive from the north was launched between two rivers, the Ourthe and the Salm. By retaking the ground between these two rivers as far as Houffalize, we would hammer a huge wedge through two-thirds of the bulge. The area between the Ourthe and the Salm was cut almost exactly in half by the road which ran from Manhay to Houffalize (for convenience we will call it the Houffalize Road). This road was the boundary between the 2nd Armored-84th Infantry team and the 3rd Armory-83rd Infantry team, the former on the right near the Ourthe, the latter on the left near the Salm.

We—the 2nd Armored Division and 84th Infantry Division—were attacking on a front 9 miles wide (Map 9). The first series of enemy strong points were strung out just below the road from Hotton to Manhay. These strong points—none of them turned out to be very strong—were Trinal-Magoster-Amonines-Lamorménil-Freyneux-Odeigne. Our ultimate objective was Houffalize, about 16 miles to the southeast. The Third Army, in order to get to Houffalize from the bottom of the bulge, had about half as far to go.

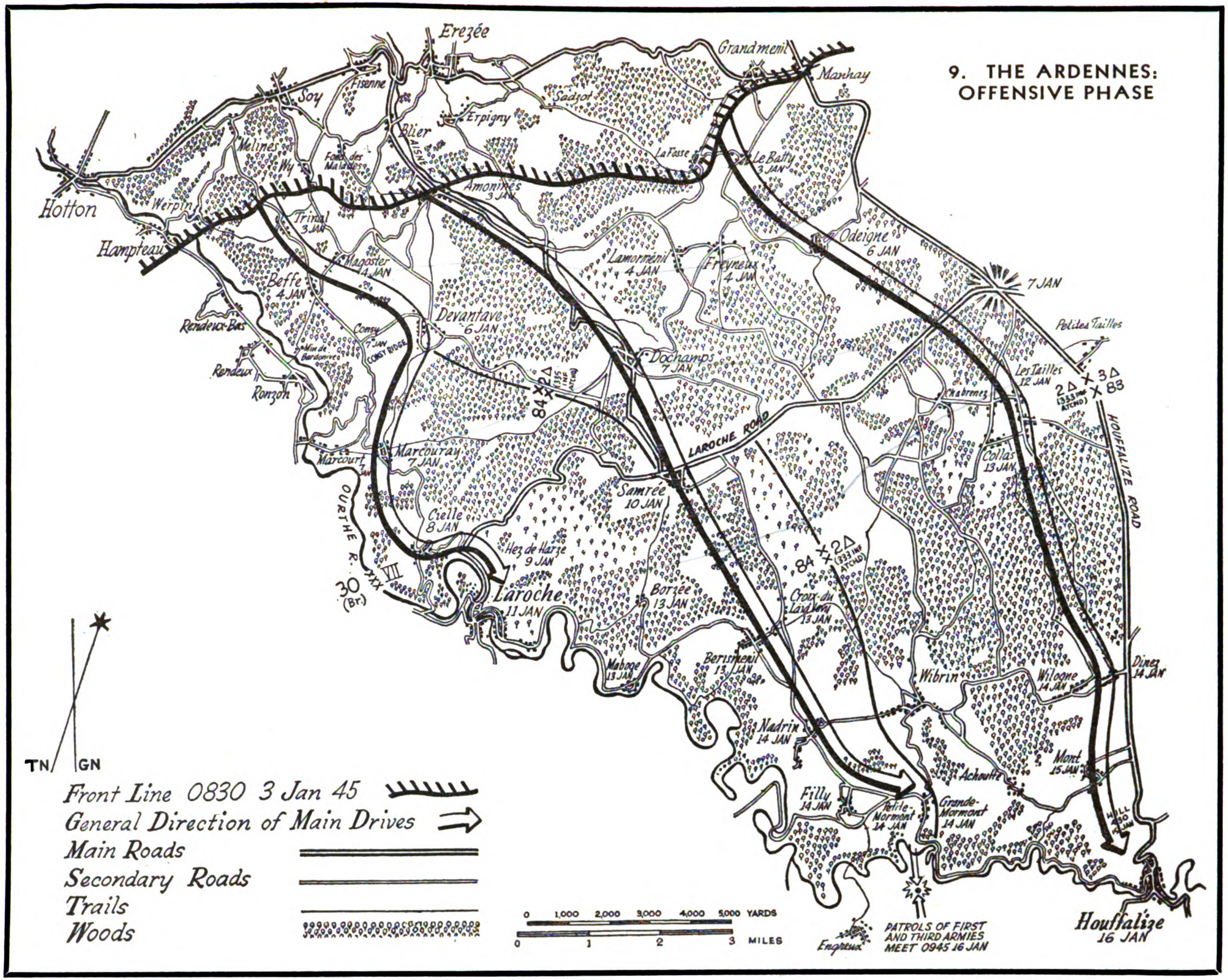
Our zone between the Ourthe River and the Houffalize Road was cut in half by a small stream, the Aisne. As a result, at least in the first six days, there were two distinct sectors, and the 2nd Armored Division started the attack with two Combat Commands abreast, Combat Command A extending from the Ourthe to the Aisne, Combat Command B from the Aisne to the Houffalize Road. In turn each Combat Command was made up of three Task Forces. The setup was complicated, evidence that the terrain was complicated.

Although our ultimate objective was Houffalize, a midway objective was the road from Laroche to the vital crossroads with the Houffalize Road (we will call it the Laroche Road). The decisive phase of the battle was fought out above the Laroche Road in the first week of our attack. By getting to Laroche, and even more, to the all-important crossroads, we would deprive the enemy of the only two good roads which he could use to salvage his forces in the bulge. The mouth of his bulge would be reduced to the danger point at Laroche, to disaster at Houffalize.

As for the 84th Infantry Division, it happened to be placed at the very center of the main effort. One of its regiments drove down to Laroche and another to Houffalize. Something else must be emphasized. Although originally planned as an armored offensive, with the infantry in support, the battle of the Ardennes quickly became an infantry attack primarily, with the armor used only as the terrain permitted. In this respect our experiences were outstanding.

The First Day

D-Day was January 3, 1945. H-Hour was 8:30 in the morning. The 2nd Armored Division, to which our 335th Infantry was temporarily attached, attacked to the southeast. The enemy was surprised. Some prisoners were


9. THE ARDENNES: OFFENSIVE PHASE
Front Line 0830 3 Jan 45
General Direction of Main Drives
Main Roads
Secondary Roads
Trails
Woods
TN
GN
0 1,000 2,000 3,000 4,000 5,000 YARDS
0 1 2 3 MILES
Hotton
Hampteau
Soy
Erezée
Grandmenil
Manhay
Melines
Wy
Werpin
Fisenne
Blier
Erpigny
Sadzot
La Fosse
Le Batty 3 JAN
Amonines 3 JAN
Trinal 3 JAN
Magoster 4 JAN
Beffe 4 JAN
Rendeux-Bas
Rendeux
Ronzon
Consy 7 JAN
Devantave 6 JAN
Lamormenil 4 JAN
Freyneux 4 JAN
Odeigne 6 JAN
7 JAN
Petites Tailles
Les Tailles 12 JAN
Dochamps 7 JAN
LAROCHE ROAD
HOUFFALIZE ROAD
Marcourt
Marcouray 7 JAN
Cielle 8 JAN
OURTHE R.
Hez de Harze 9 JAN
Laroche 11 JAN
Samrée 10 JAN
Borzée 13 JAN
Collas 13 JAN
Maboge 13 JAN
Berismenil 13 JAN
Nadrin 14 JAN
Wibrin
Wilogne 14 JAN
Dinez 14 JAN
Mont 15 JAN
Achouffe
Filly 14 JAN
Petite-Mormont 14 JAN
Grande-Mormont 14 JAN
Engreux
PATROLS OF FIRST AND THIRD ARMIES MEET 0945 16 JAN
Houffalize 16 JAN
84
2
3
83
30 (BR.)
VII

captured asleep. Until noon, we forged ahead steadily. The enemy's outpost line was broken through without much difficulty. The enemy's front was held by three divisions, the 2nd SS Panzer Division on the right near the Ourthe, the 560th Volksgrenadier Division in the center, and the 12th Volksgrenadier Division on the left near the Houffalize Road.

But that morning, in a more important way, our luck ran out. It snowed. Sleet and rain fell in spasms. From early morning, the roads were icy. The temperature was shooting down. Already the ground was hard as steel. Tank treads were slipping and sliding. Every time a tank skidded, a column was held up. Sometimes the tanks skidded just far enough to block the road.

Trinal was easy. We went in by 9:30. By noon, however, resistance was stiffer. Magoster was harder to crack. After the tanks were held up at several points by enemy bazookas and anti-tank guns, we were able to move in and pass through. The main objective that day was Devantave. Between Magoster and Devantave were a cluster of woods and a hill. The tanks could not get through the woods and our infantry had to push ahead. We got through the woods safely and one company began to step out to cross the hill. Eighty-eights were waiting for them. Eighty-eights and rockets and mortars swept the hill and crashed into the woods. We had to pull back. Light tanks were used to evacuate the wounded; nothing else was possible in the snow. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, we again tried to take Devantave but again we could not get over that hill. The night was spent east of Magoster.

Farther west that day, it was the same. One company went into Beffe but had to withdraw at night to the high ground above the village. Only on the left flank, between the Aisne and the Houffalize Road, was our progress easier. By night, we had cleaned out the woods above Odeigne. There was no resistance.

In general, then, the result of the first day's fighting was inconclusive. We had advanced from 1500 to 2000 yards but the enemy's strong points at Beffe and Devantave had frustrated us. It was clear that the enemy was making his main defensive effort on our right flank, between the Ourthe and the Aisne, and his heaviest opposition was reserved for the right sector of the right flank, the hills, woods, and villages nearest the Ourthe. This plainly showed that Laroche was his most sensitive point.

It was still snowing. That was perhaps more important than anything else. The roads at best were bad enough. Icy roads were almost impossible. The hills and woods were formidable obstacles. Knee-deep snow in the hills

and woods threatened to give us more trouble than anything the enemy could muster.

Hole in the Crust

For four days, we tugged and we pulled around Beffe and Devantave. They were the hardest four days the men in this action had ever spent and most of them were veterans. Then we began to cash in.

The problem of Beffe was typical. It was not so much that the enemy had left strong forces in Beffe itself. It was rather that he was able to pour a deadly fire into Beffe from very favorable positions—from the Consy ridge, about 1000 yards to the southeast, from the Moulin de Bardonive, about 1000 yards to the southwest, and from the direction of Rendeux-Bas, a tiny village on the other side of the Ourthe in the 53 (British) Division's sector. His trump card was direct and observed fire. Although much of the heaviest fighting went on for Beffe itself the basic problem of this phase of the attack was really the Consy ridge.

The capture of Beffe was also quite typical. On January 4, the village was subjected to an intense artillery bombardment. At about 11 o'clock in the morning the 335th's Company B began to move in. Meanwhile, the 335th's Company C retook Magoster and continued on to Beffe. By 2 o'clock both companies made contact at the southern edge of Beffe and dug in. The village was practically deserted.

In effect, after holding us up for a day at Beffe, the enemy was content to give up, only to fall back to another easily defendable position 1000 yards behind. From the first, then, his objective was not so much to hold on to any particular piece of ground at all costs as to delay us and extort the highest possible price for our gains.

The third day, January 5, was another disappointment, our last. At 1 o'clock in the afternoon, the 335th's 1st Battalion of Task Force A launched the main attack from Beffe toward Consy. Company B moved through the woods on the right of the road between Beffe and Consy while Company C moved to firing positions on high ground southeast of Beffe to support Company B's attack. Company A followed behind Company B. After advancing a bit, they received heavy enemy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire from the direction of Rendeux and Ronzon on the west bank of the Ourthe. Company B was able to get to the road junction southwest of Consy but met another barrage of the same fire. As a result, the bat-

talion was ordered to return to Beffe for the night. In general, the outcome of the fighting on January 5 amounted to small gains against very strong resistance. The 30 (British) Corps on our right flank, and the 3rd Armored Division on our left flank had the same experience.

When Consy resisted us, we turned our main attention to Devantave again. When we took it, Devantave was another deserted village. After our first experience, when we tried to take it from Magoster on the right flank, we organized another attempt, this time from Amonines on the left. At dawn, January 6, the 335th's Company I followed by medium tanks, and the 335th's Company K followed by light tanks, jumped off. By 9:30 the tanks had reached the edge of Devantave. At 11 o'clock, Company I moved into the western half, Company K the eastern half. Resistance inside Devantave was light. By 12:10 occupation was complete.

With the capture of Magoster, Beffe, and Devantave, a deep hole was driven in the crust of the enemy's defensive position on the right flank of our zone. The stage was set for an attack on his most troublesome position, Consy, the "village" with a single house.

Meanwhile, we were still progressing easily on our left flank between the Aisne and the Houffalize Road. The 333rd's 3rd Battalion went into action on the second day, January 4. Company K was sent into Lamorménil, Company L into Freyneux, and Company I into the woods west of Lamorménil. All three objectives were taken without difficulty. Tanks went into the villages before the infantry. At nightfall, January 5, Company C and the 1st Platoon of Company D, 1st Battalion, 333rd Infantry, backed by one platoon of the 771st Tank Battalion, moved out of Le Batty to Odeigne. They met enemy small arms fire but no artillery. The village was completely occupied by 1 o'clock in the afternoon of the next day, January 6. We did not suffer a single casualty.

Life in the Ardennes

By the time we took Devantave, it was clear that the original plan which gave the infantry a supporting role was not working out. The terrain and the weather were against it and they won.

The Ardennes is neither roadless nor rich in roads. A British source has estimated that 13 separate first-class roads cross the Ardennes from Germany to France. For every first-class road there are perhaps three secondary ones and numerous trails. But so many roads pass through long stretches

of woods, so many teeter on the edges of cliffs and wind up and down and around the inescapable hills. In May, too, the possibilities of resistance in the Ardennes would be vast. In January, in snow that kept piling up from the ankle to the knee, from the knee to the waist, only a little effort was necessary to turn possibilities into bitter realities.

All vehicles had to stick to the roads to get anywhere, only more often than not they could not stick to the roads because they were constantly sliding off. The next best thing was to proceed slowly and carefully but then your vehicles might—and sometimes did—miss the jump-off by hours and the infantry had gone off alone. It is curious how a terrain that is considered too tough for a tank is never considered too tough for a doughboy.

As a result of the problems which arose in the first four days for the armor, after Devantave was taken, more clearly defined zones for the armor and the infantry began to emerge. From Devantave, the 2nd Armored Division, with the 335th Infantry still attached, veered off more sharply to the southeast to get to Samrée through Dochamps. The 84th Infantry Division assumed responsibility for the drive southward to Laroche and for the Laroche Road as far as Samrée.

If the terrain was bad, the weather was worse. On the morning of our offensive, it began to snow. It snowed all that week. Sometimes the snow dribbled down. At least twice, it was fierce as a blizzard. The official temperature went down as low as 13° above zero. The trails became invisible. Even in the open, visibility was often limited to 30 to 40 yards or less. If ever terrain and weather fought on the side of the enemy, it was in the Ardennes all through our attack.

Our ordnance problems were typical. At least 40 per cent of the work of the 784th Ordnance Light Maintenance Company was directly caused by the weather. No vehicle was brought in for repairs unless it actually stopped running, but, in January the welders handled 235 jobs, the carburetor and ignition section 96, and the machine shop 78. Of these, 153 were major jobs. When two M-5 prime movers (13-ton tractors) and one heavy gun were lost by sliding off the icy roads, some cleats for the tracks were improvised to provide more traction and not another gun or M-5 was lost that way again. A special light grease was necessary for the artillery pieces, but it was very scarce. One night no more grease was available. An ordnance man had to travel all night in a storm, visit four different ordnance depots, a distance of over 100 miles, to get enough grease to keep the guns in action. No oil at all could be put on the infantry small arms. The oil would freeze and the weapons would refuse to fire. To find breaks, the 84th Signal Com-

pany men had to excavate long stretches of wires from the snow. Similar problems were faced by the 84th Quartermaster Company in its business of feeding and clothing the division. Gasoline had to be brought from dumps far back in Belgium and France over the same icy roads and in the same subzero weather. Our artillery was especially proud of its work. Despite the enormous, backbreaking problems of displacement for the heavy guns, the artillery was always able to move fast enough to support the infantry, a feat that few, if any, other artillery units in the Ardennes were able to duplicate.

The doctors also had to improvise. After the first few days of fighting in the Ardennes, it was recognized that the division was losing more men than were coming in. The reinforcements were not available to compensate for our losses to hospitals. The only way to meet the deficit was to send out fewer men. Roughly half the admissions to the 309th Medical Battalion's "clearing station" were non-battle casualties and it was decided that many of these men could be salvaged without evacuation from the division. The largest group of non-battle casualties were foot disorders and colds.

The Medical Battalion was hampered in the efforts to meet the problem by a "table of organization" which was obviously not drawn up with the extraordinary situation in the Ardennes in mind. Nothing could be allowed to interfere with the evacuation of the wounded, the battalion's primary mission. The clearing station had a normal bed capacity for 25 cases only. Army policy allowed the clearing station only three days to return to duty those patients who did not have to be evacuated. The battalion was unable to divert any equipment or personnel, which were the minimum necessary to care for battle casualties, for the special treatment of non-battle casualties.

Nevertheless, the need for a special program was urgent and a solution was found. In a large castle in Durbuy, Belgium, a provisional "Convalescent Center" was set up. The officers in charge were taken from the clearing station but the personnel was made up of the division band. The members of the band were given a complete course in medical aid to enable them to take over the wards. A mess sergeant, two cooks, and kitchen equipment were borrowed from other units. Mess equipment was obtained by Military Government. The Ninth Army furnished additional blankets and cots. Everything else was improvised. As a result, the convalescent center was able to care for 300 patients at once and the clearing station was able to return as many as 40 per cent of all admissions to duty. Had these men been evacuated, the interval between their treatment and their return to duty would have been much longer.

One thing stood out again. When nothing else moved, the doughboys moved and they moved long and often.

And what was it like for them?

In this cold and snow, the problem of taking cover was supreme. It took a good two hours to get through the frozen crust of earth. Riflemen reported that it took them as long as five hours to dig down as far as 3 feet. Not only was digging a foxhole a job in which a whole day's energies could be consumed but it was practically impossible to dig a good one at least 5 feet down. When the freeze came, rest went. In that terrible cold, there was only one thing worse than not sleeping—and that was sleeping. The quickest way to freeze is to lie still. Men went to sleep in overcoats—when they had them—and woke up encased in icy boards. It was practically impossible to bring up rations and supplies in anything but half-tracks. Water froze in canteens. Frostbite was as dangerous as all the Germans and their guns put together. In one respect, the snow was on our side. Some of our units used snow suits effectively. One unit, the 335th's 1st Battalion, made their own snow suits out of long white winter underwear.

The doughboys who went into Devantave fought 96 hours without a break and they were not through by a long shot.

The Turning Point

We took Consy the way we took most strong points—by going around it. When we took Devantave on January 6, we outflanked Consy on the left. Then we sent two battalions into the woods west of Consy—the 1st Battalion, 290th Infantry,* into the upper half of the woods and the 2nd Battalion, 334th Infantry, into the lower half—and the enemy was squeezed out in the middle. He did not choose to hold even this commanding position at Consy at all costs. By January 7, Consy was virtually cleaned out though the woods on the right flank were not completely safe for another two days.

The turning point of the entire action probably came on January 7, not where we had to fight the hardest, but where progress was still relatively easy. On the left flank, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion was sent out on January 7, the day after we took Odeigne, to capture the vital crossroads where the Laroche Road and the Houffalize Road meet. The weather was miserable. A snow storm whipped up during the attack. Nevertheless, by 9:30, the cross-

** The 290th Infantry (75th Infantry Division) was attached to the 84th Infantry Division, January 2-10, 1945.*

roads was ours. Prisoners, frozen, hungry, and disorganized, were picked up in small, wandering groups. They said they were surprised again. An attack in such harsh weather was completely unexpected. Our interrogators heard that story almost every day.

As soon as we captured the crossroads, the enemy was deprived of the only two first-rate roads to the east, the Laroche Road and the Houffalize Road. From then on, he must have been inhibited in his intentions, though he would never retire without a fight. Nevertheless, he always had to consider his chances of successfully pulling his forces out of the trap were getting slimmer and slimmer.

Partly because German resistance above the Laroche Road on our right flank was so much stronger than on our left, we were able to cut the road first on the extreme left of our zone at the crossroads. As we gained full control of the road, we continued to move from left to right. Next, one of our task forces came down from Amonines to Dochamps, and from Dochamps we launched the attack on one of the enemy's key positions—Samrée. The capture of Dochamps was a crucial point because it broke the back of the enemy's resistance in the very center of our zone.

The trip from Amonines to Dochamps was the same old story. The road, though the best in the sector, was so icy and narrow that the tanks were held up repeatedly. Road blocks, which took about two hours each to reduce on the average, some small arms fire—but this time very little artillery—represented the enemy's main effort to hold us up. We took the high ground northwest of Dochamps the next night. One incident was symbolic. After we spread out in the village, a German tank and 60 to 80 infantrymen suddenly pulled out from behind the church and made for Samrée. Our tank destroyers could not fire a shot because their turrets were frozen, a striking example of weather conditions which lessened the effectiveness of our mechanized equipment and threw the main burden of the attack and defense on our infantry.

Samrée was seemingly impregnable. It was perched on an 1800-foot hill. First we had to take two other hills, northeast and northwest of it. Our troops had to move through 1500 yards of rolling ground in knee-deep snow. The enemy had perfect observation every inch of the way. Our men said later that it was hard to see how they could make it.

At 6:30, January 9, the 335th's 3rd Battalion went out of Dochamps to get those hills. By nightfall, it had progressed to the edge of some woods about 500 yards from Samrée on the west side of the road and had taken one of the heavily wooded hills guarding the town. Company L was with-

drawn and sent around through Dochamps to occupy the second hill on the east side of the road. That night, our artillery concentrated on Samrée. Next day, at 7:30, the 335th's 3rd Battalion pushed forward to capture the eastern half of Samrée and was joined by the 335th's 1st Battalion which aimed at the western half. This time, tanks went in first, blazing away with all their guns, a sight a doughboy loves best, thinking of all the doughboys it takes to work up that much fire power. By about 9:30, the village was cleared. We were pleasantly surprised. The enemy was determined to delay us but as long as we showed our determination not to be delayed, we could always take what we wanted.

The infantrymen who went into Samrée had been fighting steadily for eight days, for 192 hours. They were certainly helped by the fact that the Laroche Road had been cut three days earlier. The artillery concentration on Samrée was extremely effective. But in the end, men had to live in some more freezing cold and wade through some more snowdrifts, now as much as 4 and 5 feet high, to get it for us.

The Capture of Laroche

The battle of Laroche was a good example of the battle of supply and the battle of stamina which every battle in the bulge was.

The roads to Laroche were particularly bad, the hill particularly high, and the woods particularly dense. A few tanks and trucks packed the snow on the roads into ice and the trouble started. The doughboy's best friend became the engineer and the artilleryman.

The main attack was launched from Devantave by the 334th's 1st Battalion. The first objective was Marcouray. Over 100 guns softened up the village for five minutes. Then, at 3 p.m., January 7, the infantry jumped off. The ground was rocky and steep. It was snowing again. Thirty minutes later, all German resistance in Marcouray was overrun. We found that the enemy positions were carefully prepared. Snow was a natural camouflage. Fortunately, we were achieving tactical surprise and much of the preparation was wasted. As prisoner after prisoner told us, the weather and terrain were so bad that our infantry was simply not expected. That was one compensation for "impossible conditions"—they were likely to lead the enemy to drop his guard. The enemy's surprise at Marcouray was shown by the equipment he was forced to leave behind. We picked up 36 vehicles: 8 half-tracks, 2 command cars, 6 U.S. jeeps, 6 civilian type cars, 5 six-wheeled

reconnaissance vehicles, 5 U.S. tanks, 2 German 1½-ton trucks, and 2 U.S. 1½-ton trucks.

A battle of supplies broke out that night. It was an engineer's nightmare. The engineers dumped sand on the road and put up luminous markers. A convoy of jeeps slipped through with food and ammunition. But two trucks piled into each other, anti-tank guns behind them piled up, and the only road forward was blocked. It was blocked all night and part of the next morning.

Nevertheless, the attack was pushed. At 1 p.m. the next day, January 8, the doughboys of the 334th's 1st Battalion in Marcouray picked themselves up, took what they had and could stuff in their pockets, and took off for Cielle, the last little village at the bend of the Ourthe before Laroche. Less than three hours later, they took Cielle the way they had taken Marcouray, only the climb was harder.

Between Cielle and Laroche, dominating the entire bend, was a stretch of very high ground, Hez de Harze, the key to Laroche. Of all our objectives, this was considered the most "impossible." An estimated company of enemy infantry was dug in on the forward slope of the hill. The hill was peculiar in one respect. The Germans could see us in Cielle from the hill but it was so heavily wooded that we could not see Laroche from it.

It was the last and hardest part of the job to make Laroche untenable. At 11 a.m., January 9, the 334th's 2nd Battalion jumped off from Cielle. Company G led a column of companies to the hill. Enemy tank, machine gun, and semiautomatic fire stopped them short. By 12:50, however, Company G had crept up to the base of the hill. Before the advance on foot was resumed, we brought all available artillery and mortar fire to bear on the hill. By 1:10 in the afternoon, as a result of this concentration, enemy infantry and one tank were seen falling back on the road toward Laroche. Company H's machine guns made the enemy's retreat costly. By 4:10 the 2nd Battalion was firmly established on the Hez de Harze. As it turned out, the chief value of the hill was the fact that the enemy did not have it, but this was no small accomplishment in itself.

The capture of Laroche was relatively uneventful. The first Allied troops to set foot in it were a patrol from the 334th Infantry which entered the town at 4 p.m., January 10. Since half of Laroche was in the 84th Infantry Division's zone and half in the 51 (British) Division's zone, because the Ourthe ran through the town, Laroche was occupied by both divisions. At 9 a.m., January 11, the 4th Cavalry Group, attached to the 84th, took over the eastern half of Laroche which was practically deserted. Two hours



MARCHE was a sleepy little Ardennes town before the German tanks were close enough to throw shells into it.

AS soon as word spread that enemy soldiers, dressed as civilians and even in American uniforms, were dropped behind our lines, the MP's checked on everything that moved at every approach to Marche.





AFTER two days of fierce fighting outside Marche, the German attack was thrown back. The enemy's heaviest losses in tanks and other equipment were suffered in the "Verdenne pocket" (some examples, above) and near the village of Menil (below).





ONCE Marche was safe, British forces relieved us and we moved farther north to wipe out the German bulge. The roads were packed as British and American convoys crossed (below). British and American MP's directed traffic on the same street in Marche (above).





AS soon as we were in position to counterattack, it began to snow. The ground became so hard that it took as much as five hours to dig only 3 feet of foxhole (above), and the weapons, such as the mortar (below), were burning cold.





THE machine gun position (above) was captured from the enemy only a few hours earlier. The anti-tank gun (below) covered a mine field near Amonines.





IT was not merely that the inhuman snow and the terrible cold made it hard to fight. They made it hard to live, to sleep, to drink, and to eat. Even when it was possible to bring some hot food to the foxholes, the stuff had to be gulped down before it was frozen. Sometimes, it was possible to build a little fire of twigs and heat up a can of C rations. But the real joy of living came in a cozy Belgian farmhouse, out of the snow, around the great stove.







AFTER three days of stubborn resistance, the enemy began to fall back, from hill to hill, from town to town. On the way to Laroche (above), we advanced through fields of snow and, on the way to Samrée (below), we advanced on roads of ice.





SOME of the riflemen advanced in snow suits alone (above), some were covered by tanks that slipped in among pine trees (below).





TYPICAL terrain: in the left background, the town of Marcourt; around the hill on the right, the road to Marcouray.

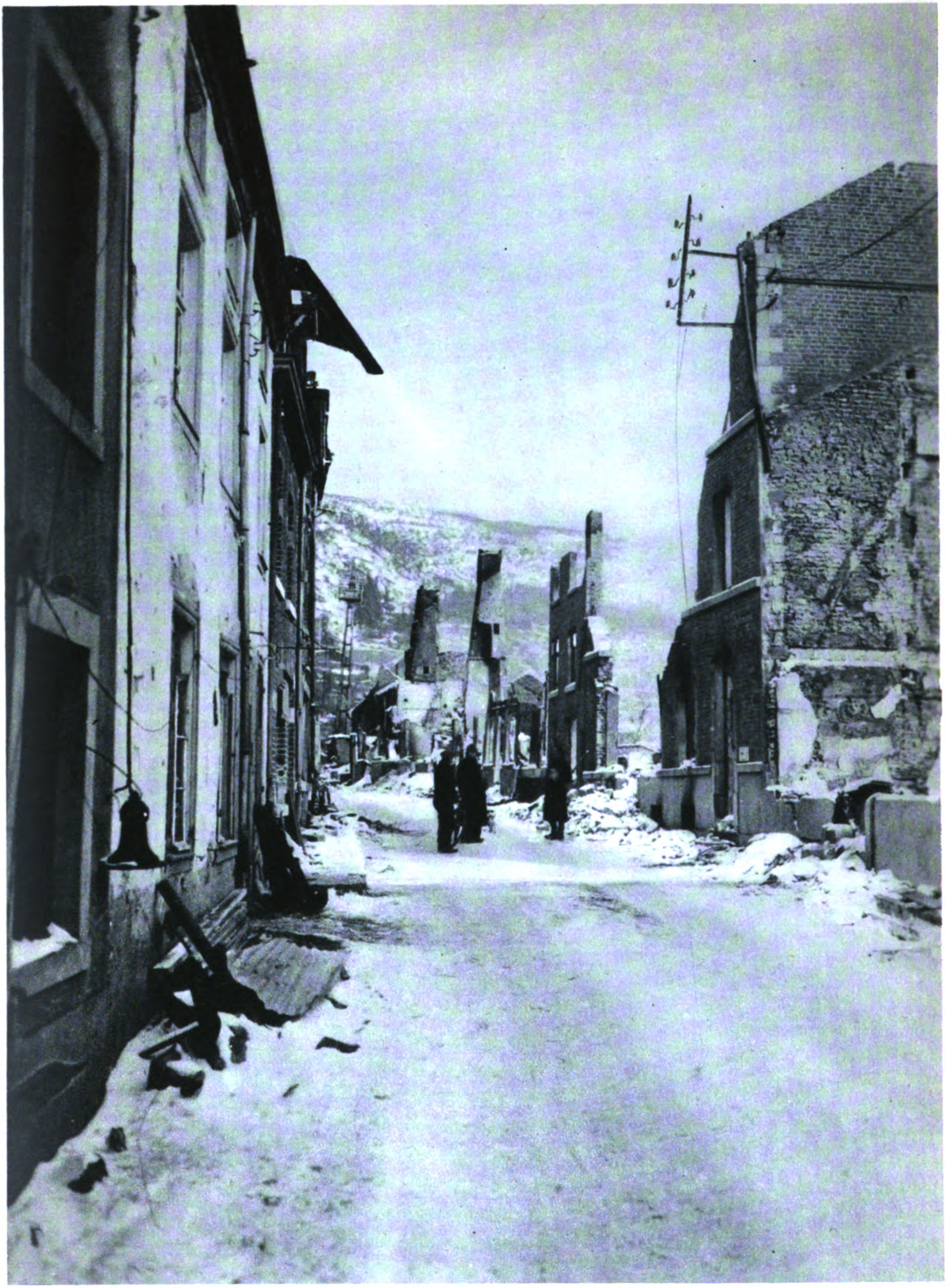
THE capture of this innocent-looking crossroads was probably the turning point of the entire action. It deprived the enemy of the only two first-rate roads to the east, the Laroche Road and the Houffalize Road.





THE casualties (above) had been hit in a mortar barrage a few minutes earlier, but medics were already bending over them. How to evacuate the wounded was one of the acutest problems of this campaign. Everything was used, from a captured horse and sled to the improvised "jeep ambulance" (below).





WITH the capture of Laroche, the fate of the bulge was sealed but the fighting was not over. This was Laroche, once the most beautiful town in the Ardennes.



A STUDY in faces at Laroche just after it was liberated.



THE second phase of the campaign was the drive to Houffalize, and the guns were given no rest. The fire orders for this 105 mm. howitzer were coming over the phone from its observer a few hundred yards ahead.

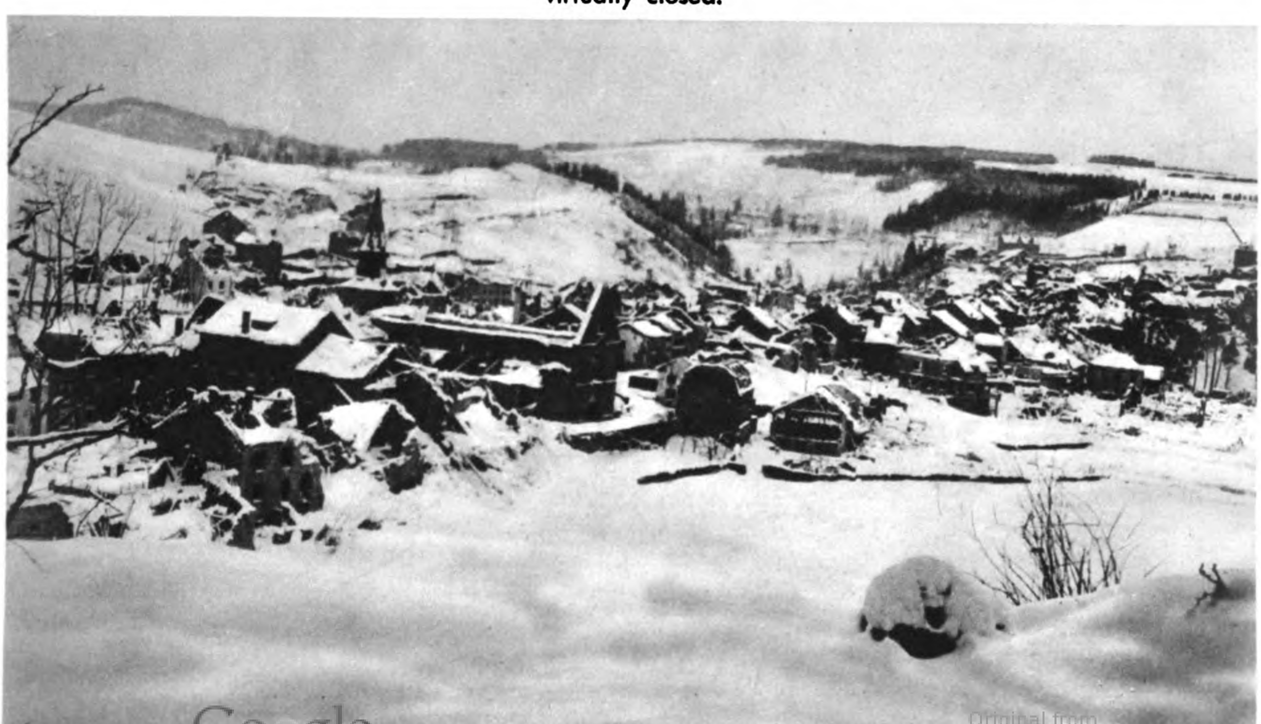
THE roads were still slick as grease and men were not the only casualties. This jeep was towed to the ordnance shop along the road.





THE queer shape in the center was another jeep but not ours. It was recaptured from the enemy and a Service Battery of the field artillery stripped it for parts.

WITH the capture of Houffalize, the shell of another beautiful town, the bulge was virtually closed.





PATROLS of the First and Third Armies linked up to end the battle of the bulge. A cavalryman of the 11th Armored Division and a medic of the 84th Infantry Division helped to make it official.

later, elements of the 51 (British) Division went into the western half. There was every evidence that the enemy had suffered heavily from our artillery concentrations on the town, once the most beautiful in the Ardennes.

From Les Tailles to Dinez

When we took Laroche, we sealed the fate of the bulge. Yet in no sense did it mean that the fighting became less difficult. The terrain and weather were still the enemy's chief allies. Above all, the German command was now fighting for time, time to regroup and reorganize behind the Roer and the Rhine, time to meet the overwhelming Russian threat.

There were some significant differences between the two phases. As long as our main objective was Laroche, the enemy's main effort was made on the right flank. As soon as we took the Laroche Road and Houffalize became our main objective, the enemy's main effort was made on the left flank. In the second phase, the 333rd Infantry was temporarily attached to the 2nd Armored Division. The 84th Infantry Division was given the right half of the zone, the 2nd Armored Division the left half. In this phase, we were faced by elements of the 116th Panzer Division and the 130th Panzer Lehr Division.

As far as the Laroche Road, the 333rd Infantry had advanced with relative ease. Once beyond the road, it ran into much more trouble. In Les Tailles and at the edge of the woods to the south, an estimated enemy battalion was dug in. On the other side of the Houffalize Road, an estimated reinforced company was holding Petites Tailles. The 2nd Battalion went out from the Laroche Road to Les Tailles, the 1st Battalion to Petites Tailles. The experiences of both were significantly similar.

To get to Les Tailles, we had to cross some more woods. The German positions were well camouflaged. The enemy's fields of fire and barrages were well planned to catch us as we came out into the open. At 8 a.m., January 12, Company F and Company G jumped off. As they came out of the woods north of Les Tailles, they were met by very heavy fire and were held up. At 3 in the afternoon, they began to move again. Ten minutes later, Company G and tanks were entering Les Tailles but the opposition was so sharp that the village was not cleared until 9 o'clock. About 140 prisoners were taken.

This happened again and again—we had to fight hard for a place but

when we took it we gathered in batches of prisoners. Looked at more closely, however, this phenomenon may tell us a good deal about a German strategem in fighting this final phase of the war.

Petites Tailles was a striking example. To get to Petites Tailles, the 1st Battalion had to move across relatively open ground down the Houffalize Road. The enemy was able to bring direct and observed fire on our troops all the time. A continuous effort was made to approach the village from the flanks, but the open terrain made the maneuver difficult. The 1st Battalion jumped off at 8 in the morning, January 12, but the enemy's heavy weapons and tanks held it up all day and inflicted heavy casualties. Under cover of darkness, however, we tried again. The fighting was hard, but Petites Tailles was ours by 9 in the evening. By chance, both Les Tailles and Petites Tailles were cleared at the same time.

In Petites Tailles, we picked up 70 prisoners. Most of them were non-German. The German officers and noncoms had got out while the getting out was good. The others were left to their own fate without orders. By the time they fell into our hands they were meek indeed. In some instances, they would walk in squad column on the street asking for an "Amerikaner" to surrender to. In at least one case, a group of 20, completely equipped with rifles and machine guns, tacked on to one of our platoons. In the dark, it is not so easy to surrender successfully.

What had happened? In this little village, which cost us so much blood to take, the prisoners were very deceptive. The German officers and noncoms had fled to fight from another village another day. The prisoners we picked up were the "expendables." Any one of these prisoners behind a machine gun under tough, experienced German officers or noncoms in the middle of the day was one man. That night, in a prisoner cage, he was another man.

From Les Tailles, we had to get to Dinez. To get to Dinez, we had to go through 4000 yards of woods. To go through those woods, we faced problems which were typical of the fighting in the Ardennes forest.

At 8 in the morning, January 13, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion jumped off from Les Tailles for the third time in two days. After taking Collas, a little village southwest of Les Tailles, at 10 o'clock it struck out for the woods. Immediately the terrain became worse than the enemy, though the latter did his best to help. The roads were terrible, barely more than trails. Under the snow, which now had had ten days to accumulate, they were invisible.

By 12 o'clock, the enemy's activity became more stubborn. By the end of the day, we had penetrated only 500 yards.

The problem of getting through the woods was faced that night. Two narrow trails ran through the woods to Dinez and two special task forces were formed to get through those trails. Both started out at 8 in the morning the next day, January 14.

The woods, snow, cold, and narrow trails made supply, evacuation, contact, control, and communication a battle of nerves. The only supplies came in by half-tracks. Mortar ammunition had to be carried by hand over 2 miles. In Odeigne, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion had captured a horse and sled. It held on to them and in these woods the horse and sled were its only means of evacuating the wounded. Radios would not work in the woods and it was impossible to lay wires. Visibility was so poor that it was always like night in the middle of the day. Since a small group of five or six infantrymen worked with one tank, it was hard to put a company or even a platoon together—a troublesome problem for the infantry whenever they work with armor.

Companies F and G rode light tanks part of the way but progress was too slow that way because the tanks were held up all the time. By pushing themselves to the limit, both task forces were able to move through the entire woods by 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Without stopping once the woods were cleared, Company F attacked Dinez and Company E attacked Wilogne. Surprise paid off again. Both were captured before the night was over and about 100 prisoners were taken in Dinez. Most of our casualties resulted from shellfire and frostbite. We were about 4500 yards from Houffalize.

One for the Books

Meanwhile, on the right flank, in the 84th Infantry Division zone, the enemy was wedged in between the Laroche Road and the Ourthe River. On the whole, progress was much easier but one minor crisis resulted in perhaps the most unusual experience of the campaign.

The first important objective was Berismenil. At 7:30 in the morning, January 13, the 334th's 1st Battalion moved out from the Laroche Road to take a hill about 1500 yards north of Berismenil. Only sniper fire was encountered and the objective was taken by 11 o'clock. At 2:15 in the afternoon, it went forward again to take another hill about 750 yards northeast

of Berismenil—the 334th's 2nd Battalion Commander, Captain James V. Johnston, once said wistfully: "Every time I see a hill, I know it's going to be our next objective."

By 6 o'clock in the evening, the 1st Battalion had taken its second hill against light resistance. Nevertheless, the situation was confused because orientation in the dark was difficult. When a patrol carrying blankets was fired on from the rear, it was clear that the battalion was almost entirely surrounded by the enemy. Later that night, a reconnaissance patrol was sent to investigate the enemy's position south of the hill but failed to return. At that, the battalion commander, Major Roland L. Kolb, decided to see for himself. Leading another patrol, he suddenly observed a German command car pull to the base of the hill and halt. Two men stepped out and began to walk up the hill. When the pair approached near enough, the patrol jumped out of hiding.

One of their prisoners turned out to be Captain Hans Gottfried von Watzdorf, commander of the 1st Battalion, 60th Panzer Grenadiers, 116th Panzer Division. Unaware that his lines had been penetrated to a depth of more than 1000 yards, the German commander was out on a tour of inspection. In perfect English, he exclaimed, "I am astonished." The commander of one battalion had personally captured the commander of the enemy's battalion opposite him and had to keep him all night before he could deliver him safely.

Berismenil itself was captured by the 335th's 2nd Battalion. It covered 3000 trackless yards, thereby achieving a considerable degree of surprise but giving up all possibility of using any vehicles to back up the attack. Berismenil was captured almost without opposition. By the end of the day, January 13, the enemy had been cleared out of approximately half the 84th's zone.

The other half was rapidly cleaned out the next day. Nadrin, a village about 1½ miles southeast of Berismenil, was occupied by the 334th's 1st Battalion at 11 a.m., January 14. Only some machine gun and small arms resistance was encountered. At the same time, the 334th's 3rd Battalion attacked Filly, about a mile southeast of Nadrin. Tanks and tank destroyers could not use the roads because they were heavily mined and the infantry went on alone. Filly was entered at 3:30 p.m. without any artillery preparation and was fully occupied a half hour later. The 3rd Battalion went on to take the last two objectives, Petite-Mormont and Grande-Mormont, by 7:15 p.m.

By this time, the bulge was practically a memory and the chief interest

of every commander—company, battalion, regiment, and division—was how to send out the patrol to make the first contact with the Third Army.

End of the Bulge

Houffalize was made completely untenable on January 15. At 11 in the morning, the 333rd's 1st Battalion jumped off from Dinez and captured the village of Mont, midway between Dinez and Houffalize, by 2 p.m. Tanks, infantry, and artillery worked together smoothly. At 4 o'clock the advance was renewed to Hill 430, overlooking Houffalize. It was taken by 5:30 without opposition.

Credit for going into Houffalize went to the 2nd Armored Division. The 333rd's 1st Battalion held Hill 430 until 5 p.m., January 16, when it was relieved by a reconnaissance element of the 2nd Armored Division. By 5:45 p.m. that day, elements of the 2nd Armored Division held the northern part of Houffalize, while elements of the 11th Armored Division held the southern portion.

When was the bulge wiped out? That may never be decided to everyone's satisfaction because a number of patrols were frantically trying to make contact with a number of other patrols at the same time. But the story of how and when the 84th closed the bulge for itself may be typical.

A 33-man patrol, representing all the battalions of the 334th Infantry, left Filly at 11 in the morning, January 15. They crossed the Ourthe in two 400-pound rubber boats, which they carried, at 11:45. The rest of the afternoon was spent in an old mill on the other side of the Ourthe. Just before dark a small patrol went forward as far as the village of Engreux, about 1000 yards from the Ourthe, where they expected to meet a patrol from the Third Army. They found the village free of the enemy but found no sign of the Third Army's patrol.

Late that night, the patrol received word that the rendezvous had been changed. Starting off again at midnight, the patrol moved out across some more woods and over a 1200-yard ridge. At 2:20, January 16, in the dead of the night, they stopped at a small Belgian farmhouse. The whole family, papa, mama, a son, and a daughter of 22, turned itself into a reception committee. There was bread, butter, and hot coffee. The patrol decided the rendezvous had been changed for a good reason.

That morning, at 9:30, Pfc. Rodney Himes, second in command of the patrol, spied a soldier walking outside the farmhouse. Since the patrol had

been ordered to stay inside the house, Pfc. Himes began to "bawl him out" and ask him "what outfit he was from."

The answer was Troop A, 3rd Platoon, 41st Cavalry, 11th Armored Division, Third United States Army.

The junction was officially achieved at 9:45 a.m., January 16. The bulge was wiped out after 13 days of hard, continuous fighting.

Beho to Gouvy to Ourthe

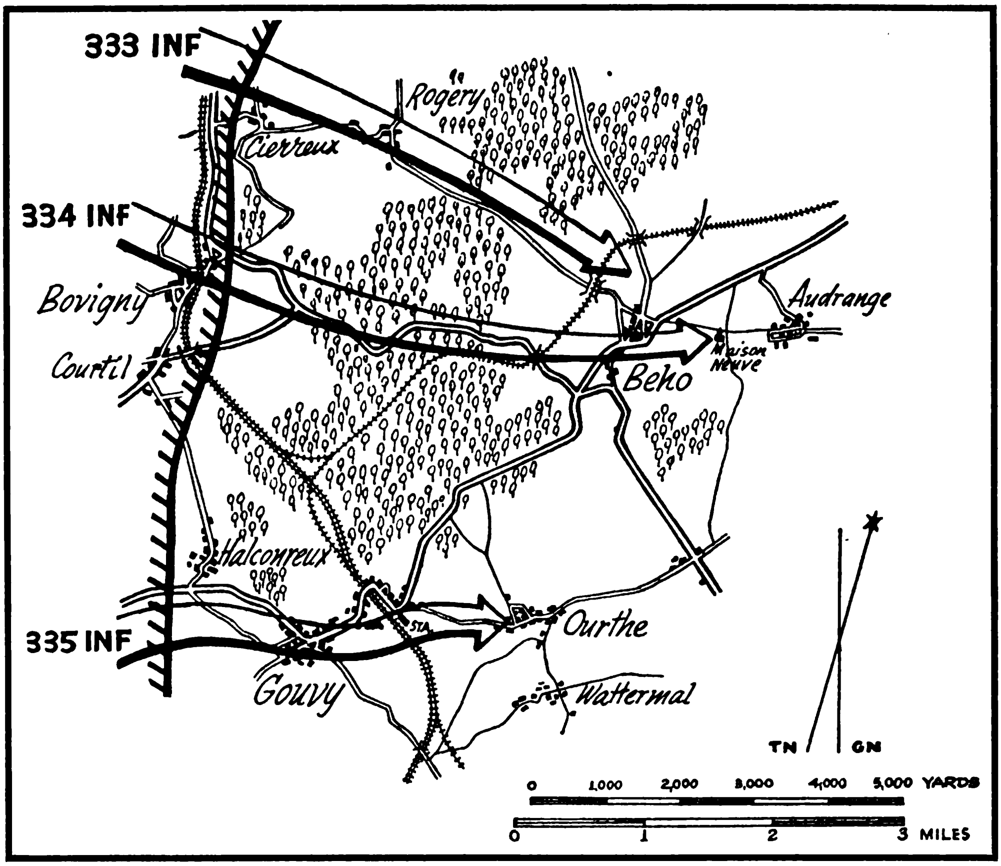
We rested five days and on the sixth day we went into battle again. This time we moved up north to do our part in the drive to take back the last bit of ground which the Germans had seized in their December offensive. The big objective was St. Vith.

This drive was actually begun on January 13, soon after Laroche fell and the German withdrawal all along the line was well under way. The 30th and the 106th Infantry Divisions came down toward St. Vith from the north, from the direction of Stavelot (Map 6). Two days later, January 15, the 75th Infantry Division attacked from the west, from the direction of the Laroche Road, and Salmchâteau fell. On January 19, the 30th Infantry Division took Recht and the 1st Infantry Division cleared a defile on the 30th's left flank. The next morning, January 20, the 7th Armored Division launched the final attack at St. Vith, also from the north, but it was held up at Born which did not fall until nightfall the next day, January 21. From Born to St. Vith were 2 more miles. As the 7th Armored was preparing to close the last gap, the 84th Infantry Division was preparing to clean out the area to the south midway between Houffalize and St. Vith.

Our objectives were the villages of Beho, Gouvy, and Ourthe (Map 10). As operations went, it was not a major operation. After taking all there was to take in our original zone, we were helping out in the last stage of the action in the zone next to ours. But to the men who fought for those three villages, the battles were every bit as important as any other battles anywhere. They were just as hard, just as bitter. Men died, dug for cover, ducked 88's, bandaged up buddies if they could, the same way. It was still cold. The snow was 3 or 4 feet deep. Vehicles still could not get off the roads without staying off permanently. There were many bridges in our new zone and all were down. Tanks, heavy machine guns, artillery, and rockets were still at the enemy's disposal. As far as the man in the line is concerned, war is funny that way. There are big objectives which make big

headlines that are relatively easy to take. And there are little objectives which nobody notices that have to be bought with blood yard by yard. For the man in the line, the big battle is the little one.

From our lines to Gouvy was a distance of approximately 2000 yards, but approximately 5000 yards separated us from Beho. On our right flank,



10. BEHO TO GOUVY TO OURTHE

the main enemy strong points were the village of Gouvy and the railroad station about 1000 yards east of the village where the enemy was prepared to throw in tanks, anti-tank guns, and infantry. At 8 o'clock in the morning, January 22, the 335th's 2nd Battalion jumped off toward Gouvy. At first the advance was slow and difficult because weather conditions were so trying and the enemy was able to take advantage of observation from the front

and high open ground to the southeast. But continued pressure forced the Germans to withdraw east of the railroad. At 12:50, Company G entered Gouvy. In the woods northeast of Gouvy, however, the 2nd Battalion met heavy resistance from dug-in infantry supported by tanks.

Beho was attacked at the same time from both flanks. The 334th Infantry came down on the right, the 333rd Infantry on the left. Two battalions worked different routes for both regiments. On the right flank, the 334th's 2nd Battalion started out near the village of Halconreux to the southwest and had to cross about a mile and a half of thick woods to get to Beho. The 3rd Battalion came down the road from Bovigny to the northwest. On the left flank, the 333rd's 1st and 2nd Battalions came down on both sides of the road from Rogery to Beho, a bit farther to the northwest, the 1st Battalion on the left side of the road, the 2nd Battalion on the right side.

The chief resistance was encountered by the 334th's 2nd Battalion. At 6:30 a.m., January 22, the 2nd Battalion jumped off from the edge of woods west of Halconreux. Company F went through the village 20 minutes later, meeting no opposition. It was planned to get the whole battalion into the woods between Halconreux and Beho before daylight but the snow and hilly ground made this impossible. At about 7:30, as the battalion was approaching the railroad at the western edge of the woods, enemy small arms fire, supported by mortars and at least three tanks, opened up. This burst of resistance held up the battalion until 1:30 in the afternoon when a way was found to bypass the opposition and the battalion succeeded in pushing forward into the woods.

Meanwhile, the 334th's 3rd Battalion was moving down the Bovigny-Beho road. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon, it had reached a point on the eastern edge of the woods from which to launch the final assault on Beho. In the original plan, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were going to make a co-ordinated attack on Beho, but the snow and dense forest were slowing down the pace of the 2nd Battalion. At 5:15, when it seemed clear that the 2nd Battalion might not be able to participate in the joint attack before dark, the 3rd Battalion was ordered to take Beho alone.

After a heavy artillery concentration, the 3rd Battalion moved into Beho. The village was occupied by 8 o'clock that night. At this, the enemy force in Beho tried to withdraw to the north, only to find itself in the direct path of the 333rd's 1st Battalion which had meanwhile been coming down from Rogery.

At 8:15 that morning, January 22, the 333rd's 1st Battalion had jumped off from Rogery and had pushed on to the high ground about 400 yards

northeast of Beho by 5:30 that evening. Two hours later, when the enemy force in Beho tried to withdraw to the northeast under pressure of the 334th's 3rd Battalion, it ran straight into the 333rd's 1st Battalion. For more than an hour, the fight raged. Some of the heaviest action of the day took place northeast of Beho as the enemy was driven to the east by our artillery and small arms fire.

Meanwhile, the 7th Armored Division was pushing down to St. Vith to which the enemy was still grimly holding on, the last prize of his Ardennes adventure.

The Last Mile

The next day was spent securing Beho and Gouvy, our primary objectives, from enemy counterattacks.

To secure Gouvy, we had to take the village of Ourthe. At 7:45 in the morning, January 23, the 335th's 3rd Battalion moved out along the Gouvy-Ourthe road. As the leading elements of Company K advanced to the edge of Ourthe, the enemy on the high ground to the east and southeast opened up with automatic weapons, heavy mortars, and small arms. The advance was halted. Company I was sent to attack Ourthe from the north but came under the same fire. Our artillery was then called on to soften up the enemy force in Ourthe. Under cover of smoke, artillery, and mortar barrages, Companies K and I, with the support of Company C, 771st Tank Battalion, started forward again at nightfall. This time, Ourthe was ours.

At Beho, the problem of securing our gains turned out to be the problem of repelling a strong enemy counterattack. Once more it was demonstrated that the enemy, far from resigning himself to permanent loss of initiative in our zone, would try from time to time to wrest it from us.

At 6:30 in the morning, January 23, the 334th's 2nd Battalion renewed the attack from Beho to seize the high ground and crossroads about 1000 yards east of Beho, between Beho and Audrange, and the high ground about 2000 yards southeast of Beho. By 7 o'clock, Company E had surprised the enemy outposts at the crossroads and had occupied a near-by monastery. By 8:30 Company G had taken the other objective without resistance and had begun to dig in. But the day's fighting for Company E was not over.

At 8:30 a force of 200 men from the 20th Panzer Grenadiers, 9th SS Panzer Division, supported by three tanks, approached from the direction of Audrange. The tanks began to shell the monastery. Fortunately, the walls

were exceptionally thick and the fire had little effect on our men. At the same time, the German infantry closed in. Backed by tanks, this threat was more dangerous. To meet the critical situation, Company E called for artillery on the monastery itself. When our shells began to land with deadly effect in the very yard of the monastery, the tide began to turn.

Meanwhile, Company F had been sent out to relieve Company E. When Company F arrived on the high ground southeast of the monastery, as many Germans as were still alive beat a hasty retreat to Audrange. By 9 o'clock, the crossroads was quiet again. In effect, our share of the battle of the Ardennes was done.

Post-Mortem: Offensive Phase

What did we accomplish?

The battle of the bulge was one of the hardest, if not the hardest, fight of the Allied armies in Europe. The weather, the terrain, and the enemy combined to make a campaign of peculiar bitterness and difficulty. Many veteran observers considered it worse than anything they had seen.

But it paid off. It was estimated that the German command invested 28 divisions in the Ardennes. By the time we launched our counteroffensive on January 3, the enemy had probably lost about 90,000 men in the vain effort to break through to the Meuse and had about 134,000 left. The enemy's losses in equipment were just as important, if not more so. It was estimated that the Germans moved 40,000 to 50,000 vehicles of all kinds into the bulge. In tanks, the 84th Infantry Division alone accounted for 47. The Germans probably lost a greater percentage of vehicles in the bulge than men. Despite the fact that the enemy fell back to the Siegfried Line in that sector without serious disorder on the whole, we did take about 1000 prisoners a day in the last week of the battle of the bulge. From these indications, it may be seen that a hard, if not a staggering, blow was struck at the German army in the west in the five weeks of the fight in the Ardennes.

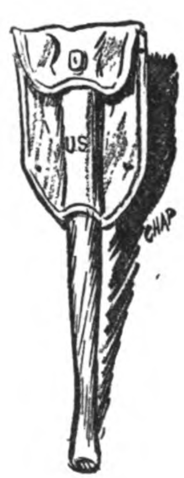
What may we safely conclude?

The Allied armies in the west, and our own army in particular, showed that panic was absolutely alien to them. An extraordinary situation arose. An extraordinary effort was made to dispose of it. The Germans were just as much surprised, if not more so, by our amazing ability to bounce back as we were surprised by the original blow. The first German prisoners we took were pretty cocky. They thought it was 1940 all over again. A good

many really believed the story that the Fuehrer would be in Paris in three weeks. In a week, they were not so confident. In ten days, all hope was gone. The prisoners showed intense depression. We had scored a psychological as well as a material victory. Even the stupidest or the most fanatical now knew that the game was up.

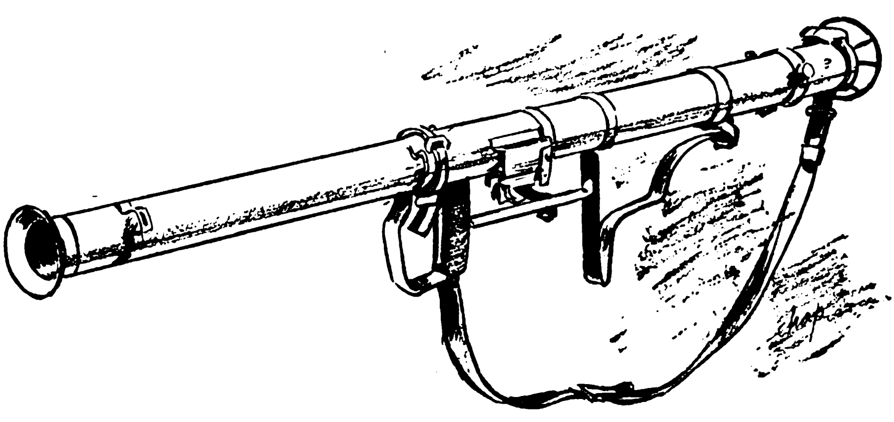
It is interesting to note that the Red Army waited until the German command had fully committed its last reserves in the Ardennes before the unprecedented offensive in the east was launched. At a time when the common enemy needed every available man and gun and vehicle in the east, we had the reserves in a vise in the west. In this sense, we made an important contribution to the Russian victory in the East. In the same way, once the Red Army's tide swept into Germany, the enemy tried frantically to extricate himself in the West. In this way, our Russian allies made an important contribution to our victory in the West. In this global war, a little pressure in the right place went a long way.

None of those who were in it will ever forget the Ardennes. If we came through, by far the largest credit must go to the men who shouldered rifles and carried machine guns and mortars in the freezing weather, plunged through knee-deep and waist-high snow, dug foxholes in ground as hard as steel, stormed hill after hill in the face of perfect enemy observation, and cleaned out woods as dark as night in the middle of the day. That is not the whole story but it is the best part of it.



Part Three

TO THE RHINE



CHAPTER VIII

The Battle behind the Battle

After six weeks in the Ardennes, we came back to Germany on February 3. We came back to the Ninth Army and the XIII Corps. We came back to all the old places, Geilenkirchen, Beeck, Lindern, and the rest. We came back to rain, to mud, and, above all, to ghosts, ghosts of houses, ghosts of pillboxes, ghosts of people. We came back to the Roer. Our sector was almost the same as before, except that the 84th assumed responsibility for the river front extending from Linnich to Himmerich. When we had left the Siegfried Line, there were no houses but there were some good cellars. Now there were no good cellars. Although this front was relatively inactive during the battle of the Ardennes, the artillery was never quiet and a few more shells knocked down a few more walls every day. By February, every village was completely grotesque.

But one thing that we brought back with us was new. It was self-confidence. Every man goes into his first battle wondering how he will behave. So does every staff. In war, at least modern war, there may be no such thing as survival of the fittest because death is often such an accident. A fragment from a shell can find its way into the most unlikely places and stay away from the most obvious. But it is more than ever true that those who survive become fit. Every action produces a core of men who have come through somehow. They may not have been any better than those who did not come through but they are in a different class from those who did not have to go through it at all.

We had been fighting continuously for ten weeks—as long as it had taken the Allied forces to go from the Normandy beachheads to Paris. After going through the Siegfried Line, we thought that nothing could be harder but in many respects the Ardennes was even harder. In any case, it would be difficult to imagine battles in which the conditions were more completely different. Yet, to be modest, we were always lucky. There was never a real setback. Sometimes we had to fight three days instead of one to take a place

but we never failed to take one. The psychological effect of this success was quite noticeable after the Ardennes. The division took on a personality. Even battalions and companies reflected this feeling of pride. The men had something to live up to. They had something to boast about and they had some boasts to make good.

When we came back to the Roer, we were able to look back at two types of operations. In the Siegfried Line, the problem was one of fixed fortifications. In the Ardennes, the problem was open warfare. In the third phase, the battle from the Roer to the Rhine, we put behind us the experience of two other types—a major river crossing and a major break-through. Although the old lessons were not wasted, it is interesting to note that we never did the same thing twice.

The Problem of the Roer

Ever since the end of November, we had been able to see the Roer. By the beginning of February, two months had passed and we were still looking at it—but only from the western bank. It was the first river to hold up our army in the European theater and for that reason it may have made us more than ordinarily cautious. What the Seine, the Somme, and the Meuse, all much greater rivers, had not been able to do, the Roer did.

Roughly, the Roer runs parallel to the German frontier from Roermond in the north, where it joins the Meuse, to Duren in the south. It also runs parallel to the Rhine, about 25 miles farther east, thus giving the defense two strong natural barriers against any attack from the west. Of the two, the Roer is a minor barrier, at least on paper, the Rhine a major one. The Roer is 60-85 feet wide at mean water, although it reaches a width of 200-260 feet in winter, compared to a width of 900-1200 feet for the Rhine. The Roer has a depth of 2-5 feet at low and mean water but may rise as high as 12 feet in winter and flood tide, compared to the Rhine's depth of 30-45 feet. South of Linnich, but not north, the Roer may be forded at several places at mean levels but the river overflows its banks at most places by 1000 to 3000 feet during high water or artificial flooding and becomes completely unfordable. By February 10, the western end of the Schwammanauel Dam was in our hands but the enemy had destroyed the valve house, had opened the gates of the Hembach Dam, and had blown up the outlet of a conduit of the Urft Reservoir. As a result, the river rose to a height of 11 feet, 1 inch, almost to maximum, and remained nearly 10 feet high the rest of the month.

The terrain between the Roer and the Rhine was not too favorable for defense though it was not one-sided. The defense was favored by commanding high ground on the east side of the Roer. A low plateau between the Roer and Erft Rivers permitted observation for about 5 miles west of the Roer (Inset, Map 11). In our advance from Geilenkirchen to Lindern, the enemy's command of this high ground was one of the most troublesome factors. The most costly and least vulnerable artillery fire probably came from this area. In the end, however, this plateau proved more valuable to the enemy when we were west of the Roer than when we had crossed over because we did not move eastward in a straight line to the Rhine. A good network of roads tended to encourage a movement toward the northeast.

Once across the Roer, the offense was favored by the absence of any well-defined ridge system, the large areas of open, flat terrain, broken only by some gently rolling ground and some wooded areas. For the first time in the battle of Germany, a large-scale use of armor was possible. Without real terrain advantages and without fortifications in real depth, the Germans could have put up a stubborn defense only by converting every city and town into a natural fortress. Had they possessed the necessary materiel, manpower, and determination, they could have done so, because the entire area is densely built up, especially toward the Rhine near München-Gladbach, Viersen, and Krefeld. To achieve a major break-through, it is almost always necessary to move rather freely on fairly good roads. A long line of strong points could have been made out of the towns and villages astride every road in this area.

In general, once the Roer was crossed, the possibility of a break-through was great if we could bring over sufficient men and equipment in time. In fact, the opportunity was so tempting that it was one of the main elements in our planning. When the break-through came, it was no accident.

The Crossing on Paper

Three weeks were spent on planning and training for the crossing. The staff meetings were practically continuous. It was the first time that we had been able to plan in such fine detail. The big lesson of the Siegfried Line was preparation but we had always regretted the lack of time to prepare minutely. Now we were given the time—by the Roer dams. After coming back to Germany on February 3, we took over the Linnich-Himmerich front on the Roer from the 102nd Infantry Division on February 7. The

crossing was expected to take place only three days later, at 5:30 a.m., February 10. On February 8, the 334th Infantry, which was leading the way, was ordered to stay under cover the following day in order to increase the possibility of surprise.

At about 5 p.m. on February 9, the crossing was delayed at least 24 hours. The next day, February 10, the postponement was extended "indefinitely." The delay was forced by the flooding of the Roer when the enemy partially destroyed the upper dams. We had to wait two weeks for the flood to subside. In those two weeks, we planned and trained for a single operation as never before.

In the planning stage, the engineers, artillery, traffic control, and assault boat training were given special attention. It is best to look at them separately to see in what way and to what extent the problems, which the first doughboys who jumped off the boats on the east bank of the Roer faced, were met in advance.

THE ENGINEERS. In addition to our own 309th Engineer (C) Battalion, the 171st Engineer (C) Battalion was placed in direct support of the 84th Infantry Division for the Roer crossing. In general, the 309th was responsible for the assault boat crossing and the 171st for the bridges.

The crossing was planned on a one-battalion front, that is, one battalion would cross at a time. The first battalion would cross in assault boats in two waves, two companies and 35 boats in each wave. The first two waves would be provided with their own boats so that no recrossing of the river would be necessary to bring over the entire first battalion. In the event the footbridges were not available in time, provisions were made to cross succeeding infantry battalions in assault boats, too.

The assault boat crossing was assigned to Comany B and two platoons of Company A, 309th Engineers. They were responsible for operating the boats and furnishing engineer guides to the crossing sites. If footbridges were in, the engineer guides would lead the next battalion to cross to the bridge sites. If not, the engineer crewmen would cross the second battalion in assault boats. After the first two battalions were crossed in boats or on bridges, four engineer boat crews would remain near the crossing sites to evacuate casualties. Company C, 309th Engineers, was placed in general support of the operation in Geilenkirchen on a 15-minute alert from H-Hour.

A detailed study was made of road blocks and other obstacles on the east side of the Roer. Most of this information came from patrols, prisoners, and aerial reconnaissance. It was planned to cross an engineer platoon in

assault boats or on the footbridge if available and to send special equipment over on LVT's (Landing Vehicles Tracked). This special equipment included an R4 tractor, 12 sections of prefabricated wooden treadway bridge on wheels, a jeep, and a ¼-ton trailer. It was believed that this platoon and equipment could neutralize all blocks encountered prior to the crossing of additional engineer platoons and equipment on heavier bridges. As soon as the vehicle bridges were open, Company C, 309th Engineers, was to work on all east-bank obstacles.

Three infantry footbridges were planned across the Roer at Linnich, approximately 200 yards between the first two and 100 yards between the last two. On D-minus-2, the equipment for these bridges was to be taken to a storage site about 150 yards from the river. At H-minus-3½ Hours, this equipment was to be carried by hand to the bridge sites and placed along the bank, but clear of the assault boat paths in the vicinity. The anchor and float cables were to be carried across in the initial wave at H-Hour and construction of the footbridges started immediately. The estimated completion time for the first footbridge was H-plus-45 minutes. A 1-inch rope was also to be taken across for lifesaving purposes. These bridges were assigned to Company A, 171st Engineers.

An infantry support bridge to support a 2½-ton truck was planned at bridge site No. 4, also at Linnich. The anchor and boat cables of this bridge were stored on D-minus-2 with the footbridge equipment. At H-Hour, a "near approach party" was to start work on a "near approach road" and on the "bridge approach" on the western bank. The anchor and boat cables were to be taken across at H-Hour with the initial wave. At H-plus-30 minutes, two trucks were to bring the bridge equipment and personnel to the bridge site, with two additional trucks following every 15 minutes. At H-plus-1 hours, the "far approach party" was to cross on the footbridge if available. The estimated completion time was H-plus-5 hours on condition that small arms fire was eliminated by H-plus-1 hour.

Two heavier bridges were also planned. A floating treadway bridge, to carry any load (Class 40), was to be constructed about 100 yards below the infantry support bridge. Two trucks and a quickway crane were to come to the bridge site at H-plus-2½ hours and two more trucks every 45 minutes thereafter until H-plus-7½ hours. Work on the "near approach" was to begin at H-Hour and on the "far approach" at H-plus-1 hour. The estimated completion time was H-plus-10 hours on condition that small arms fire was eliminated by H-plus-1 hour. This bridge was assigned to Company B, 171st Engineers.

Finally, a Bailey Bridge (Class 35) was planned at Körrenzig to support a capacity load. The work on the "near approach" was to begin at H-plus-1 hour and on the far side two hours later. The work on the bridge itself was to begin as soon as small arms fire was eliminated from the bridge site. The estimated completion time was ten hours after the start of construction. This bridge was assigned to Company C, 171st Engineers.

In effect, all the bridges were planned at Linnich except for the Bailey Bridge at Körrenzig. The equipment for the entire crossing included 100 M2 assault boats; 532 feet of M2 treadway bridge; 400 feet of infantry support bridge; 432 feet of footbridge; 250 feet of double-double Bailey bridge; 400 feet of heavy ponton bridge; 2750 life preservers; and 6 LVT's.

For two weeks before the crossing, two engineer patrols of three to five men each went out on nightly reconnaissance as far as the river's edge. These patrols brought back valuable information on the location of barbed wire entanglements, mine fields, west bank conditions, slopes, softness of ground, water puddles, trees, and the like. Since fire was often received from the eastern bank, we were able to pin-point many enemy gun emplacements.

Combat engineers earned the name. One engineer patrol worked the west bank of the river from the autobahn crossing at Linnich to the Körrenzig crossing. At the Körrenzig crossing, Lt. John Coester, 171st Engineers, was seriously injured by an exploding "Schu" mine. The noise attracted heavy fire from the other bank. The rest of the patrol had to make a dive for the ground. All they could do was toss first-aid packets to Lt. Coester but the wounded man could not help himself. Lt. David H. Gibson, Company B, 309th Engineers, cleared a way through the mine field, crawled up to Lt. Coester, treated him hastily, and dragged him to safety. It was midnight and the trip back to safety was 1500 yards.

ARTILLERY. Our artillery had to make two plans—a plan of deception and a plan of support. An enormous collection of artillery pieces was brought close to the Roer in advance of the crossing but it was realized that the enemy knew something unusual was going on despite the fact that the guns were not allowed to fire. At one of the first staff meetings, General Barrett was asked to draw up a fire plan, not only to support the infantry in the crossing but to create the maximum element of surprise for the operation as a whole.

The basis of this plan was three successive nights of shelling, the first two feints, the third the real thing. On the night of D-minus-2, we would fire a five-minute preparation near the actual crossing site which would look and

sound like a preparation for the crossing. We picked an odd time in the morning, 2 a.m. After our rehearsal, we could study the enemy's reactions and pick up flashes from machine gun and mortar positions. On the night of D-minus-1, we would repeat the theme with variations. We moved the time up to 5 a.m. and the place to Hilfarth on the left flank of our zone. Again we could watch the enemy's comeback. The third time would be the crossing itself. Prisoners later agreed that our long and intense artillery preparation on D-Day was not considered a signal for the crossing because we had laid down somewhat similar concentrations for two nights previously without any follow-up.

It was planned to cover the preparatory work by the engineers and others on the night before the crossing by smoke from pots and from 4.2 mm. mortars. The crossing itself was to be covered by heavy automatic weapons fire from flank locations and by a curtain of 60 mm. mortar fire from 24 mortars in battery. It was felt that the barbed wire obstacles and anti-tank mines on the far shore would be more or less neutralized by the heavy concentration of mortar fire. The smoke pots were handled by the 74th Chemical Smoke Generator Company, the 4.2 mm. mortars by Companies C and D, 3rd Chemical Battalion.

The principal preparation for the crossing, however, was to be a 45-minute artillery concentration close to the river bank on the enemy's side. It was General Bolling's idea that every available gun would be fired in support of the crossing and this meant not merely the regular artillery pieces but anti-aircraft guns (used in a ground role), tanks, anti-tank guns, tank destroyers, and machine guns. At H-Hour, this barrage would be shifted back a few hundred yards, enough to give our troops a margin of safety but yet so close that the enemy would not be able to tell with certainty whether the preparation had ended.

The artillery preparation for the crossing was the greatest single artillery effort in our combat experience. The big question was: Could our foot soldiers cross the Roer before the enemy would dare to come out into the open in the face of the shelling?

Traffic control. Since we were crossing on a very narrow front—we were bringing a tremendous amount of power to bear on it and a single road had to carry most of that power on wheels—the traffic problem was serious. It was given the most serious attention because it was one of those factors which may be neglected easily or left to the last at the cost of risking the entire operation. It was not the vehicles which we massed that

counted but the vehicles that we actually were able to move across the river in fighting shape.

In general, two principles were worked out: (a) a system of priorities in order to cross first things first; (b) a system of control posts to unsnarl any blocks on the route to the bridge sites.

The key was control. Although traffic control as a whole was left under G-4, the Traffic Control Officer, Lt. Robert H. Agnew, worked in the G-3 Section in order to stay in the closest touch with tactical priorities. The Military Police representative, Captain John J. Ridge, was stationed at the bridge site. As the first vehicle bridge neared completion, the commanding officer of the 309th Engineers, Lt. Col. John H. Morava, was to notify Captain Ridge of the anticipated completion time. Captain Ridge would then notify Lieutenant Agnew, who would notify the units with second and third priorities of the estimated time of departure of vehicles from their assembly area for movement to the bridge sites. In practice, this meant that as soon as Captain Ridge was notified of the bridge's completion, he would notify Lieutenant Agnew who would issue movement orders to the first infantry unit to cross.

Only on order from division headquarters could any unit start the movement of its vehicles from the assembly areas to the bridge sites. The march regulations were: speed—20 mph maximum; distance—60 yards between vehicles; time interval between march groups—2 minutes. No chains could be fitted on any vehicles unless authorized by the division headquarters after the treadway bridge was completed. Command, staff, and messenger traffic within 3 miles of the bridge sites had to be held down to the minimum necessary for the conduct of operations and such vehicles had to be plainly marked.

The vehicles of every unit were given code numbers so that the system of priorities would be easier to enforce. The priorities were:

1. Engineers (309th Engineers (C) Battalion and 171st Engineers (C) Battalion).
2. The first infantry regiment to cross (334th Infantry).
3. The second infantry regiment to cross (335th Infantry).
4. One battalion of artillery (84th Division Artillery).
5. Approximately 50 trucks of the 84th Division Quartermaster Company.
6. The 84th Division Artillery (—).*
7. 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion (—).

* *This symbol (—) indicates that a major portion of the unit, but not all of it, was involved.*

8. 771st Tank Battalion (—).
9. The third infantry regiment to cross (333rd Infantry).

The danger of blocks on the road to the bridge site was so great and the effect so costly that special precautions were taken to prevent any blocks or to handle them smoothly and quickly if they should occur. On the road at Linnich to the bridge site, two ranks of vehicles were permitted but the traffic was all one way—to the bridge site. Heavy vehicles were placed on the right, light vehicles on the left. As soon as the infantry support and treadway bridges were completed, the traffic was directed to both bridges simultaneously. Vehicles that broke down were ruthlessly shunted off the road but, fortunately, there were not many.

It was also one of the biggest jobs of our military police, who were called out in force as traffic guides. They were posted at all important points and had to stay out in the open until the job was done. Each post was connected by telephone with a separate traffic switchboard. In this way, the traffic control system had its own wire net and could get its reports through without delay. If a block of any kind occurred at one post, those behind were immediately notified and could take measures to ease the strain.

It is hard, if not impossible, to isolate the factors which made the crossing a success because the chief credit must go to the integration of all the factors; but this may be said—the failure of the engineers, artillery, or traffic control might have disrupted the entire operation at the outset and never have given the foot soldiers an even chance.

Training. The training of the troops for the crossing was carried on at the same time as the planning, partly because the crossing was postponed and more intensive training and planning were possible. On February 3, the day we came back to Germany, word was first received about the projected crossing of the Roer by the 84th between Brachelen and Linnich. A training program was started even before we went into the line on the Roer front.

First the engineers were trained, then the infantry. On three successive days, February 6-8, the regiment selected to cross first, the 334th Infantry, conducted assault boat training at a platoon training site on the Würm River near Marienberg. The infantry was instructed by the engineers in the theory of assault boat crossing, including the mechanics of getting in and out of the boat, carrying the boat, use of the paddle, boat team organization, and practice in running across footbridges. The 334th's 1st Battalion, chosen to lead the assault, was drilled for three daylight periods and one night period. The 334th's 3rd Battalion, the second to cross, had two daylight

rehearsals. The 334th's 2nd Battalion, which was expected to cross on footbridges, went through the drill once in case bridges were unavailable. Each battalion went through the training with its supporting elements from special and attached units.

When the crossing was indefinitely delayed on February 10, a more ambitious program was undertaken. On the nights of February 13 and 15, two drills were conducted at a battalion training site on the Würm River near Suggerath. At this point, the front was wide enough to put half of a reinforced battalion on the river at once. As a result, the initial and succeeding battalions went through the identical maneuver involved in the actual crossing. The complete operation was rehearsed with each battalion six times. These rehearsals included the infantry march to the initial assembly area, march to the forward assembly area, formation into individual boat groups, the meeting with the engineer guides, the march under engineer guidance to the boat assembly area where the boats had previously been placed by engineer personnel. At the boat assembly area, the infantry met engineer crews, picked up the boats, and the combined infantry-engineer boat group carried the assault boat—each boat weighed about 400 pounds—to the water's edge, launched it, and crossed to the far shore.

When the postponement was stretched into the third week of February, we looked for even more realistic training conditions. These were found at the Neville Training Site on the Meuse River approximately 2 miles north of Vise, Belgium. The conditions on the Meuse, about 400 feet wide with a current of 4-6 miles per hour, closely approached the conditions that might be expected on the flooded Roer. This final training was given on February 19-20. A single boat was overturned in the entire training program and the sole casualty was a 60 mm. mortar.

While waiting for the crossing, the division headquarters was located in Lindern, still one of the hottest spots in Germany. Reversing the natural order of things in the army, the regiments were farther back. For once, headquarters people were able to ask: "Why don't you visit us more often?"

Operation Grenade

It was time for another field order. No. 6, on the crossing of the Roer, was issued at 10 p.m., February 21. It was known as "Operation Grenade" and, as usual, fought out the battle on paper.

In the XIII Corps zone, the field order said, the 84th Infantry Division

attacked on the left, and the 102nd on the right. The mission of the 84th was to "seize and secure" a bridgehead in the vicinity of Linnich. The 334th Infantry had to cross first, the 335th Infantry right behind, the 333rd Infantry employing all its fire power in their support before crossing itself. The line of the 334th was given as Körrenzig, Rurich, and Baal in the first jump, and Granterath, Hetzerath, and Matzerath in the second. The line of the 335th, on the left flank, was Doveren, Houverath, and Golkrath (Map 11).

It should be noticed that the direction of our drive was north and northeast rather than east, which would have been the most direct and shortest course to the Rhine. It is perhaps impossible to overestimate the importance of this point and it should be kept in mind to understand the nature of the break-through.

Second, it should be emphasized that a major break-through was our aim from the first. The idea was not merely to take advantage of a possible opportunity but to plan for and create the opportunity. The objective was not merely to cross the Roer barrier, which was conceived as only the first phase of the drive. The objective was nothing less than the maximum disruption of enemy resistance "to the limit of endurance of (our) men and materiel." The pursuit, said the field order, had to be "relentless." The crossing, crucial as it was, was only an incident in the break-through as a whole which really started on the far bank of the Roer.

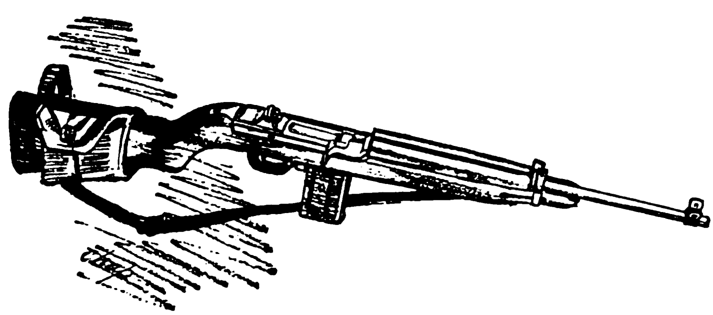
Third, the main supporting fire for the crossing was provided by the artillery and other supporting ground fire, rather than by air power, although air cover was available from the XXIX Tactical Air Command. Corps artillery was used for counterbattery fire, division artillery for close support of our infantry.

Why was the crossing made on a narrow front, a one-battalion front? The ideal crossing is made on a broad front in order to conceal the exact location of the major effort. Local conditions in our zone accounted for the decision. The road net was limited, and confined us to a relatively small area if we were to take the maximum advantage of it. We had to cross where the river was still in its channel, though higher than normal. Flooding made the other positions of the river in our zone too wide. Our forward assembly area was shelled periodically and the last 400 yards to the river's edge were exposed. Elsewhere, we would have had to cross about 1000 yards of clear, flat, flooded meadowland. By deciding to cross in the dark, we hoped to reduce the danger of exposure to a minimum. In addition, on a narrow front the effectiveness of our artillery preparation was greatly enhanced. We

poured so much lead down on such a small space that anything in it was smashed or stunned.

Such was the planning and preparation for the crossing and the break-through. It was the battle behind the battle, the battle of ideas and training which the average, individual soldier cannot be expected to know in all its complexity but which may determine his fate and the fate of the whole operation. The crossing was an outstanding example of the team at work.

It was also a staff achievement. General Bolling once declared: "Staff work may never look smooth to the men in the platoons—I know because I was down there—but only a fast, young, able staff made possible our successes, not only in the Roer crossing but in every one of our actions. Nobody was jealous of anyone else. We worked together, ate together, played together. If I had to go through the whole thing all over again, I would choose the same staff and I can't think of a higher tribute than that."



CHAPTER IX

Across the Roer

In a sense, the crossing was begun with the feints on the two nights before the jump-off. On the night of February 20-21, the concentration was fired from 2 a.m. to 2:05 a.m. at the crossing site. A two-hour smoke screen was also laid along the far shore. On the night of February 21-22, this concentration was repeated but the time was changed to 5 a.m. and the place was changed to farther upstream. The smoke screen lasted most of the night to permit the engineers to work near the river bank. As prisoners related later, the crossing was expected on both these nights and the enemy stayed on a very nervous alert but he dropped his guard when it failed to materialize.

On the night of February 22-23, under cover of the smoke screen, the 309th Engineers cleared the routes to the river and marked them with tracing tape. (The third illustration following page 164 shows the details of the Roer crossing.) Six lanes were laid out from the final assembly area to the boat group area, a distance of approximately 700 yards, and 35 lanes from the boat group area to the water's edge, a distance of approximately 200 yards. This job was extremely difficult and dangerous because the enemy was expecting a crossing all night and his artillery was unusually heavy in the whole area. The engineers had to work in the dark under severe fire on one of those minor details that could conceivably determine the fate of the whole undertaking.

It was D-Day, February 23. At 1 a.m., the engineers began to haul the assault boats to the boat assembly areas. They finished at 2 a.m. The footbridge equipment was placed in front of the bridge sites between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. The infantry was also moving. The 334th's 1st Battalion, the first to cross, left its "rear assembly area" in the vicinity of Leiffarth and Würm soon after midnight and marched to the "initial assembly area" in Linnich by 1:30 a.m. Just outside Linnich, the weapons platoons picked up their machine guns and mortars, which had been carried there the day before to

save energy for the crossing. While the men were picking up these heavier guns, the Germans fired a few bursts of machine gun fire at them but the bullets were high. No one stopped working. As they entered the town, a volley of rockets came at them. Everyone smacked into the nearest ditch. Otherwise, the going was smooth.

The 1st Battalion went to the "final assembly area" at 2:45 to meet the engineer guides. They picked up the assault boats, one squad of infantrymen to a boat, one engineer in charge. At 3 a.m., they left for the water's edge. From this point on, each boat load was strictly on its own until it reached the next assembly area on the other side of the Roer. "I was thinking about home that morning," Pfc. Leroy Carver, Company C, said. "It was no place for kids there on the river bank. There were too damn many bullets and too much artillery to suit me."

Meanwhile, our artillery and all the supporting weapons, which meant practically everything we had and could commandeer, were thundering away in that tremendous 45-minute preparation. It started at 2:45 a.m. The effect was a thick, continuous curtain of fire close to the river bank of the far shore. A total of 8400 rounds of field artillery ammunition was expended. The 557th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion fired a total of 272,736 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition, wearing out 125 barrels. The crews of the 771st Tank Battalion supported the crossing and the follow-up for about 15 hours, firing so much ammunition that they often became sick from the fumes in the tanks and had to get out to relieve their nausea. A total of 120,000 rounds were fired by 24 multiple-mount 50 caliber machine guns, and 4000 rounds were sent off by 24 60 mm. mortars in 15 minutes. T/Sgt. George H. Hale, Company C, said the barrage "was so heavy that as we approached the water to man the boats, we were nearly shocked ourselves."

There was one tense moment. At 2:55 a.m., Lt. Eugene R. Giddens, leading the engineer guides, was wounded. Three officers were immediately sent to replace him. Before they could arrive on the scene, all the engineer guides and boat groups were able to meet and find their way. They walked, stumbled, jumped, slid and ran to the water's edge.

The Crossing

At exactly 3:30 a.m.—H-Hour—the artillery barrage was shifted back a few hundred yards. The engineers rushed forward to the footbridge sites

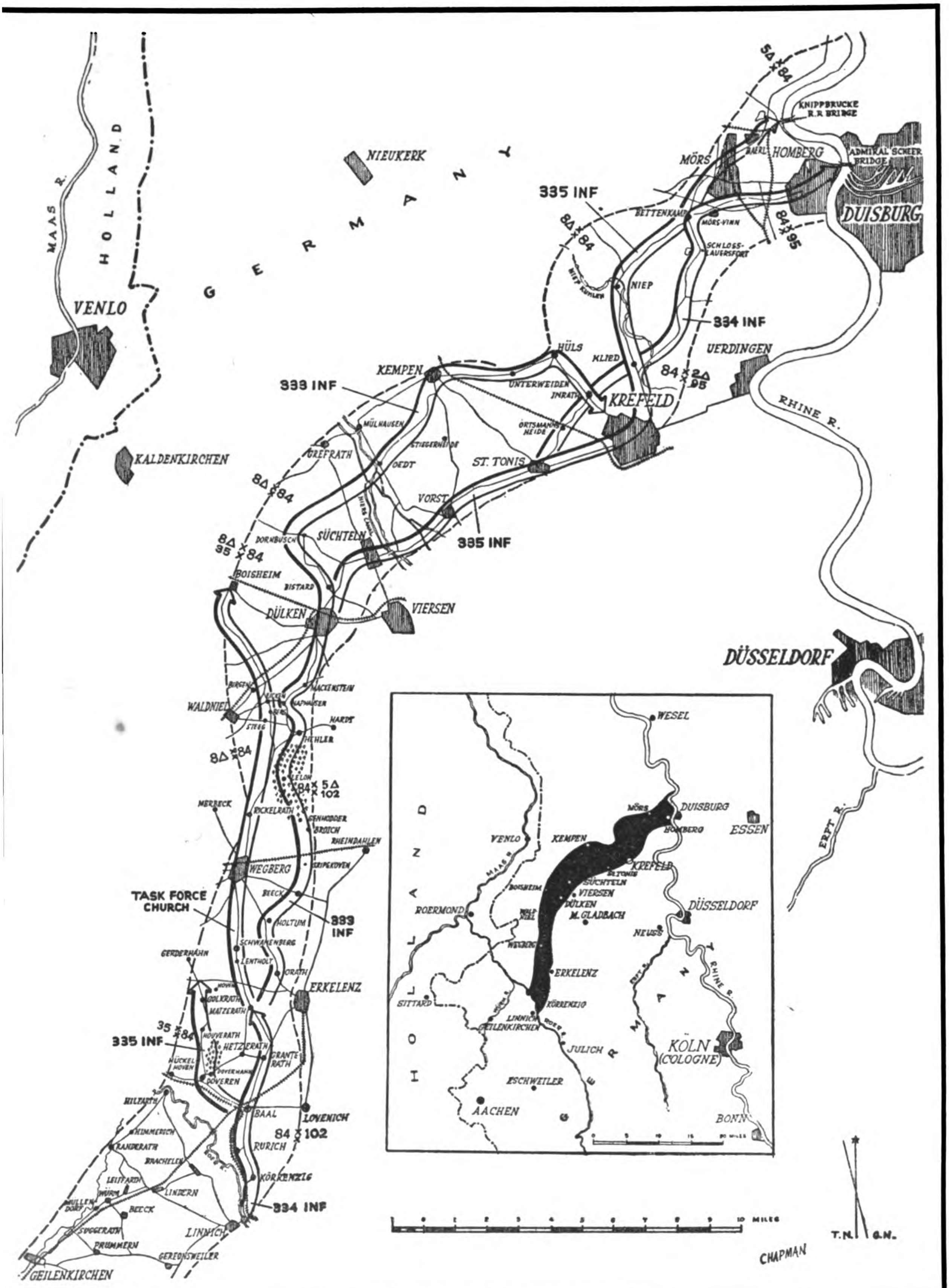
with their equipment. The first wave of 35 boats, carrying Companies A and C, 1st Battalion, 334th Infantry, hit the water.

The crossing was unexpectedly easy. "I really don't know whether the enemy fired any shots at us or not," Lt. Richard Hawkins, Company A, said. "Our own guns going off all around us in support of our crossing drowned out all other sounds." That was one impression. For Company C, T/Sgt. Hale reported: "Going across we received a few 88's and mortars. There were no small arms, except one machine gun which got three men in one of our boats."

Company A came over intact. Company C lost two boats, dragged downstream by the swift current into some burp gun fire. Many boats, however, drifted 75-100 yards downstream in the strong current; this was important because it was impossible to return them in the dark to the west bank to bring across the second crossing battalion. The two companies crossed on a front of approximately 700 yards. The boat trip took about ten minutes. The second wave of boats, bearing Company B and Company D, hit the water at 3:45 a.m. By 4:05 a.m., the entire 1st Battalion was safely across. The casualties were negligible.

Once across, the troops hit the shore, dropped their rubber life belts, and headed for the railroad track, about 400 yards away, where they had to put together the platoons and companies, split up in the boats for the crossing. Everyone expected the run to the railroad track to be one of the nastiest moments in the job. "What the boys were the most afraid of was the expected mine fields across the river," T/Sgt. Harry L. Peiffer, Company A, thought. There were plenty of mines just where we had crossed. The men had a right to worry about them. Lt. Hawkins explained why their fears were not realized: "We went right through a field full of stake mines but all the trip wires attached to the mines had been cut by our artillery and mortars, and not one of the mines exploded in spite of the fact that some of the boys even stumbled over the mines themselves."

The 1st Battalion changed directions as soon as it hit the railroad track. Instead of continuing to go eastward, it struck out for Körrenzig to the north (Map 11). At this time, a momentous decision was made. Resistance was temporarily light because our shelling had driven the Germans into their holes and had taken the fight out of them, but it was clear that sooner or later they would stick their heads out and give us more trouble if they could. The very lack of contact indicated that the enemy was lying low but we could not count on that forever.



11. OPERATION GRENADE

Should the 1st Battalion hold up and mop up the bridgehead or should it push on with all possible speed, leaving the mopping up for the 3rd Battalion which was next to cross? It was not a one-sided argument. If the 1st Battalion mopped up, the bridgehead would be safer but the entire drive might have bogged down and the enemy in Körrenzig and farther back might have been given a chance to recover and get set. If the 1st Battalion went ahead without mopping up, an accident or an upset at the bridgehead for the 3rd Battalion might have had disastrous consequences if the follow-up units could not get through in time to assist the 1st.

Either way, risks were unavoidable. The important thing was that we were playing for the highest stakes—a major break-through. We were determined to pass through the crust of German resistance into the soft open spaces in the enemy's rear and develop a momentum which could carry us clear to the Rhine or at least most of the way. To achieve a break-through of such dimensions, only one kind of risk was permissible. It was necessary to race ahead at all costs, to take the fullest advantage of the element of surprise which had already helped us so much in the crossing, to keep the enemy off balance and confused. So the 1st Battalion did not wait to mop up the far bank. It stayed near the bridgehead only long enough to reorganize, and drove for Körrenzig, 1500 yards away, before dawn.

Meanwhile, what was happening at the bridgehead? If the crossing was unexpectedly easy, the footbridges were much more difficult. Though the consequences were never serious, there were some embarrassing moments.

Footbridge No. 1 on the right was almost completed when enemy automatic fire broke out from a stretch of shore that had not been cleaned out. As a result, it could not be anchored on the far bank.

Footbridge No. 2 was completed by 4:10 a.m. but it was immediately knocked out by assault boats that drifted downstream from the 102nd Infantry Division's sector.

Footbridge No. 3 was completed at approximately the same time as Footbridge No. 2 but it was knocked out by a direct hit from enemy artillery which broke the cable.

This fire from the enemy's side was not very heavy, at least not until approximately 5:30 a.m., but in the usual amount of harassing fire, a number of lucky hits were scored. As a result, none of the footbridges were in when the 334th's 3rd Battalion had to cross. At the same time, all the assault boats had not returned from the east bank because so many had drifted downstream. Under fire and in the darkness, it was impossible to recover

them in time for the 3rd Battalion. The fate of the first three footbridges and the assault boats necessarily delayed the 3rd Battalion's crossing.

The aggressiveness of the 334th's 1st Battalion is worth some notice. Companies A and C moved into Körrenzig at 6:10 a.m. The 3rd Battalion started to cross the river at 6:45 a.m. In other words, the 1st Battalion had attacked its first town, approximately 2000 yards from the crossing site, before the 3rd Battalion had even begun to cross.

The 3rd Battalion's crossing was slow because it had to resort to a shuttle service. A few boats went over and back for about four hours, until 10:35 a.m., to bring the whole battalion over. The enemy's artillery was heavier and heavier. While the 3rd Battalion was crossing, lead was falling all over the west bank but the shells were high once the boats hit the water. Some of the boats slammed into the wires stretched across the river by the engineers for the footbridges and the men in them were dumped into the water. Nevertheless, the 3rd Battalion's casualties in the crossing itself were also relatively light.

In the early morning hours of D-Day, then, at least three things were going on at once. The 1st Battalion was striking out to the north. The 3rd Battalion was crossing in relays. The engineers were struggling to put in a footbridge that would stay in. On the whole, we were satisfied but we were not yet breathing freely.

The Bridgehead

For the 1st Battalion, Körrenzig was not as easy as the Roer but it was easier than anyone had expected. In fact, the town was much less troublesome than a marsh and a canal through which they had to wade knee deep to get to it. By the time they were ready to break into the town, everyone was wet, uncomfortable, and angry. Nevertheless, the artillery was still doing a good deal of the work. Just before entering, the infantry called for a special five-minute artillery concentration on Körrenzig. Then Company C took the side of the town nearest the river, Company A the side away from the river. It was still quite dark.

Company C ran into one machine gun which held up the advance temporarily. One rifle grenade and one bazooka round cleared the way. Prisoners were picked up obviously shell-shocked. A German officer gave himself up to Company A in the very first street. At first, he took our men for his

own and simply fell into our hands before he knew better. Surprise was still working for us. A few snipers popped out of houses but they were handled on the run. Körrenzig was cleared by 8:30 a.m., about the time half of the 3rd Battalion had succeeded in getting across the Roer. Something which had worried our men was the possibility of German armor in the area. As yet we had no tanks and no anti-tank weapons except bazookas. But no enemy armor was encountered in Körrenzig. This was a major stroke of fortune. Enemy artillery, however, was encountered. As soon as both companies began to dig in, the Germans sent over a heavy barrage which cost us more casualties than the crossing or the town. Nevertheless, the halt at Körrenzig was only two hours. The next objective was Rurich, about 1500 yards slightly northwest. Company A stayed in Körrenzig and Companies B and C drove on. It was 10:30 a.m. By then, the whole 3rd Battalion had crossed the Roer, had disposed of the nests of enemy resistance bypassed at the crossing site, and was hurrying to Körrenzig in the rear of the 1st Battalion.

Rurich was another triumph of surprise. Between Körrenzig and Rurich, only a few scared and scattered enemy posts were met. Rurich itself was attacked at 2:05 p.m. It was cleared in less than a half hour. Rurich was able to put up even less resistance than Körrenzig. Our artillery was waiting impatiently for the word to give Rurich some special attention just before the infantry went in. There was some disappointment when an infantry officer called in to say: "Don't bother. We're in already." But if Rurich was taken without any artillery preparation, the artillery was largely responsible. The tremendous concentrations for the past 12 hours had completely torn up the enemy's communications. The German forces in Rurich knew that we had crossed the Roer only when they saw us in their own town. They had received no warning, no information. No prisoner, officer or enlisted man, knew what Allied unit he was facing.

It had taken us less than 12 hours to obtain a bridgehead about 4000 yards long and 1000 yards deep, though the depth was less important because we were advancing north, not east. The 1st Battalion of the 1034th Volksgrenadiers, 59th Volksgrenadier Division, which outposted the river opposite our crossing, tried to withdraw to a new line of trenches about 800 yards east of Körrenzig. Thus the enemy was maneuvering to meet our attack on the assumption that our direction was straight eastward toward the Rhine. Instead, by turning north from Körrenzig, we met the badly depleted 351st Volksgrenadiers, 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, as well as elements of the

219th Engineer Battalion of the same division. The 183rd had never recovered from its beating in the Geilenkirchen salient and its opposition was not severe.

By the time we had taken Rurich, our whole drive had speeded up. The engineers were reassembled at Footbridge No. 2 and it was successfully completed by 11:30 a.m. Instead of three footbridges, as planned, only one was actually constructed. The third crossing battalion, the 334th's 2nd Battalion, was, therefore, the first to use the footbridge. The entire regiment was over by 2:50 p.m., soon after the capture of Rurich. It had taken about 12 hours to bring over the first regiment, the 334th Infantry, though this was less important than the fact that the attack was aggressively pushed at all times by as much of the regiment as had managed to cross earlier.

The Battle of Baal

February 23 was one of those long days. Although so much had happened since the jump-off, it was only midafternoon when Rurich was taken. So far the advance was mainly the work of the 334th's 1st Battalion, which received a presidential unit citation for its achievement in the whole Roer-Rhine drive. Fortunately, the 3rd Battalion of the same regiment was not far behind and now it was thrown in to continue the attack, to push the pursuit, as the field order had said, "to the limit of endurance." The next objective was Baal, approximately 2500 yards slightly northeast of Rurich.

Ever since its own crossing, the 3rd Battalion had been cleaning out nests of resistance bypassed by the 1st Battalion. At 6:30 p.m., as night was falling, it moved out of Rurich toward Baal. Company K started out on the left, Company L on the right, Company I in reserve. The road passed by a large chateau, then a clearing, then a large patch of woods, another clearing, and finally ran into Baal. About 300 yards from the chateau to the right was a pillbox, skillfully camouflaged as a haystack. The first sign of life in the haystack was a burst of fire.

As soon as the pillbox opened up, Companies L and K drew back to the chateau. Two bazooka teams were sent after the pillbox. Meanwhile, mortars made a bonfire out of the hay, emptying the pillbox and saving the bazookas the trouble. The companies made a fresh start. It was almost dark. Ahead was the patch of woods.

In those woods, for the first time, the enemy showed that the element of surprise was gone and that he was reacting to the attack. Apparently, as our

companies were moving out of Rurich toward Baal, an enemy force was moving out of Baal toward Rurich. While we were getting rid of the pillbox, this force, consisting of eight or ten tanks or assault guns and six personnel carriers, was spotted in the woods. Artillery and air were immediately called to deal with them. The enemy's attack was broken before contact on the ground was ever made, another striking example of the assistance our infantry was getting from other arms. Four tanks or assault guns were destroyed, two damaged, and the six personnel carriers knocked out. The remaining tanks or assault guns withdrew toward Baal after dark. The rest of the march from Rurich to Baal was relatively easy. At the outskirts of Baal, the infantry held up while the artillery concentrated on the town for ten minutes. The doughboys moved into another dazed village.

The occupation of Baal was swift. Some burp guns sounded off in the main street but resistance in general was light. By 9:15 p.m., the town was cleared. For the moment, the outlook was bright.

We had estimated that Baal could be taken on D-plus-1, that is, on February 24, so that on this first day we were ahead of schedule. We were also considerably ahead of the divisions on either side so that our flanks were completely exposed, except for the location of our reserves to meet possible counterattacks. The second regiment to cross, the 335th Infantry, started over the footbridge at 4:15 p.m. and was completely across before midnight, the 1st Battalion in Rurich, the 2nd Battalion between Rurich and Körrenzig, and the 3rd Battalion in Körrenzig. Our bridgehead, stretching approximately 3½ miles from Linnich to Baal, was occupied by two full infantry regiments before D-Day was finished.

All that day, however, bridges, communications, and contact were still problems. The infantry support bridge was started at 9 a.m. and opened for traffic by 5:30 p.m. But the treadway bridge was strafed by enemy aircraft at 8:30 p.m., just as it was ready, and eight floats were hit. It had to be repaired. As a result, no tanks or tank destroyers were able to cross the river on D-Day, leaving the infantry completely without armor support. No wire would stay in across the river under enemy shelling. All efforts by the 334th Infantry to establish contact with the 407th Infantry, 102nd Infantry Division, on the right failed. The 102nd, which crossed below us, also turned north but had farther to go after its wheeling movement to catch up. The 335th's 3rd Battalion was, therefore, thrown in on the right flank of the 334th Infantry in an effort to make contact with the 407th Infantry in the vicinity of Lovenich.

Perhaps the most critical moment of the first day came at 8:30 p.m. when

the treadway bridge was knocked out. In the end, the effect was not serious because our artillery helped to protect the infantry against the enemy's armor. Still, it was a painful moment in an otherwise successful day.

Counterattack at Baal

As far as Baal, we had received no counterattack of large proportions, except for the assault guns and personnel carriers which the combination of air and artillery had routed from the woods between Rurich and Baal. On the night of February 23, however, our front was not fully organized because we had moved so fast and because no heavy equipment had moved up with the infantry. The weapons companies had been able to bring across only as much as they could carry by hand, namely, heavy machine guns, 81 mm. mortars, and some mines. The 3rd Battalion was dug in on the northern outskirts of Baal; the 2nd Battalion on the eastern side; the 1st Battalion protected the rear or southern side—all 334th Infantry.

Baal was unhealthy from the first. That night, for the first time, the enemy took advantage of the opportunity. At least three German tanks were not hit in the woods and they tried to break out soon after we took over the town. Coming from the direction of Rurich, they entered Baal from the rear and struck Company L. They raked the company CP with point-blank fire. Two GI's were herding about 30 Germans in one of the streets. The tanks appeared on the scene, the prisoners took off, the guards escaped in the darkness and confusion. Then, along the railroad embankment at the far end of Baal, some German machine guns opened fire. Just before the three tanks showed up with headlights blazing, someone in Company L reported they were friendly. Waving and yelling, several men tried to warn the tanks away from the machine gun fire. The enemy tankers let them have an extra burst of lead in return. Raking the buildings all the way, the tanks drove out of Baal to Granterath. This was merely an incident, not the enemy's main effort which came somewhat later, but it helped to give our men the nervous feeling that anything could happen in Baal that night. Anything almost did.

Just before midnight, at 11:40 p.m., still February 23, three enemy battalions and three assault guns launched a counterattack. The 2nd Battalion of the 343rd Volksgrenadiers, 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, moved southeast from Doveren. The 176th Fusilier Battalion, 176th Volksgrenadier Division, moved south from Hetzerath. The 2nd Battalion, 330th Volksgrenadiers,

183rd Volksgrenadier Division, attempted to outflank us on the right from Granterath. Artillery fire stopped the center prong from Hetzerath but the other two attacks from the flanks struck Company L and Company K.

Company L's 2nd Platoon was trying to defend a vital underpass and road junction on the road to Granterath from a battered building. One German unit succeeded in reaching the 30-foot railroad embankment and underpass. Machine guns and rifles opened up on the 2nd Platoon.

"Enemy bullets began pounding the rear of the building," Lt. William Nelson said. "Germans seemed to be everywhere but in the dark they could not be spotted. Machine gun and BAR fire held the attackers back but our ammunition ran low. The situation became so critical that there was nothing left to do but to call down artillery on that very spot. I had no radio communications so I sent runners to the company CP but they never got there. Lucky for us, the company commander had received word from somewhere else that there was trouble and he called for artillery on the underpass. For an hour the underpass was shelled and my platoon sweated it out in our house which was only 25 yards away."

This artillery treatment saved the 2nd Platoon. All through the night our men could hear the Germans near the underpass crying out, begging for the shelling to be lifted. One German-speaking GI yelled at them to surrender. In small groups, they charged across the road to give themselves up. Some dragged or carried wounded. In the end, about 25 prisoners were jammed in the already crowded cellar of the house. They claimed that they were the only ones left of the 200 or more men who had started the attack from Granterath. Then the artillery was lifted.

Company L's 1st Platoon had a similar experience. First the second squad was surrounded. The Germans called on them to surrender. The BAR man opened up and managed to cover the squad's escape. The third squad was less fortunate. It was surrounded in a house, the Germans told them to give up, a well-placed hand grenade talked back. German bazookas forced them to jump upstairs. They could not see what was going on outside but they kept flinging out hand grenades and firing rifles to discourage an assault on the house. For awhile, there was a stalemate; the enemy could not get into the house and they could not get out. Finally, artillery arrived. When the shells began to remove the top floor, the squad made a hasty return to the bottom floor. It was nerve-racking but the Germans were forced to leave.

Company K was also protecting an overpass, this one on the road to Doveren. The platoons were holding houses on both sides of the road. When the enemy attack came, artillery was requested. The story was virtu-

ally the same. "Another request came in for artillery closer to our positions," 1st Sgt. Paul Long said. "It was already falling within 75 feet of us. This time the artillery actually fell in the street between the houses in which the platoons had their positions. Then one of our boys spotted a German tank firing at us from across the street. We thought our time was up and we burned all the papers we had on us. But our artillery fire became so hot that the tank withdrew. The artillery also proved too much for the German infantry and the whole attack fizzled out."

The battle of Baal ended strangely. Just before dawn, February 24, three German tanks and some infantry support came down the road from Granterath at Company L's 2nd Platoon, which had had barely enough time to recover from its experiences earlier that night. The enemy force stopped outside the underpass, not more than 500 yards from the platoon, which had used up all its machine gun ammunition and all its grenades. Only one bazooka round was left. The tanks sat there for an hour. Our men watched them tensely, wondering what we could do this time to hold them off if they drove in. But apparently the German tankers were not sure of themselves either. As the dim light of morning spread out, the German tanks backed away.

Also connected with the battle of Baal was an attempt later that morning, at about 8 a.m., February 24, to retake Rurich in order to cut off our forces in Baal. The 5th and 7th Companies of the 330th Volksgrenadiers, 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, tried to slip in between Baal and Lovenich but walked into the fire of the 335th's 3rd Battalion. The battalion opened up when the German column was only 100 yards away. Apparently the enemy's officers abandoned their men. The demoralization was sudden and complete.

"The enemy was in a perfect position for us to shoot at him," T/Sgt. Harold E. Baker, Company K, said. "They stumbled upon us without knowing we were there, a fact that was later confirmed by some prisoners. We continued firing everything we had for about two hours. The artillery joined in. Finally, Pfc. Edward J. Serris calmly left his foxhole, walked to the enemy positions, and brought in 15 prisoners. From then on, others continued to bring in prisoners. At about 4 o'clock, we were ordered to advance 1000 yards, which carried us right through the enemy's foxholes. We found the German positions full of casualties and others stunned by the terrific shelling."

The action was over before dusk, February 24, and so was the battle of Baal. The 334th's 3rd Battalion also received a presidential unit citation for its part in the Roer-Rhine advance.

D-plus-1

On the morning of D-plus-1, February 24, then, the combination of infantry and artillery had demonstrated that our bridgehead was solid. The treadway bridge was also put in to stay in. It was opened at 11:20 a.m. A few minutes earlier, two ME 262's, German twin engine jet planes, came over to bomb and strafe the bridge sites. The gunners of Battery C, 557th AAA (AW) Battalion, hit the first one on its first trip over. It tumbled down. The second plane came in to bomb the bridge. One of its bombs was hit in mid-air and exploded. The gunners let go at the plane and struck it, too. It tried to get away but soon crashed near by. The two planes were the first of this type shot down by the XIII Corps.

The first tanks rolled across the treadway bridge almost immediately. Company A, 771st Tank Battalion, crossed the Roer at noon and arrived in Baal two hours later in time to assist in mopping up the town of the last snipers and stragglers. Company C and Company B followed in that order and the entire tank battalion was over by 11 p.m. that same day. It should be noted that the infantry did not have any armor support across the river for almost 36 hours.

Thus far our infantry advance had been achieved solely by the 334th Infantry, the first to cross. It was now the turn of the 335th Infantry, the second to cross, to widen and deepen the penetration.

At 9 a.m., February 24, just as Baal was quieting down, the 335th's 1st Battalion moved up from Rurich to Baal in order to pass through the 334th in Baal and continue the attack. As so often happens in such a swift advance, pockets of resistance have to be cleaned up by the follow-up units for some time and the "rear" may be just as jumpy as the "front." The 335th's 1st Battalion had to fight its way to Baal, especially in the woods between Rurich and Baal, which had given us so much trouble the day before. Its objective was Doveren, about 2500 yards northwest of Baal, and Doverhahn, a little village on the eastern outskirts of Doveren.

Even to get out of Baal, the 1st Battalion had to fight hard. About 200 yards north of Baal, just beyond the railroad along the Baal-Doveren road, it ran into stiff opposition from enemy small arms and machine gun fire. It was midday before the dug-in Germans were cleaned out. As a result, the 335th's 2nd Battalion was committed on the 1st Battalion's left flank. The 2nd was ordered to move through Rurich to the northwest, cutting across country to strike directly at Doveren. The 2nd also hit resistance almost

immediately from entrenched enemy infantry along the Brachelen-Baal railroad. Instead of holding up, however, it swung over to the right as far as the western edge of Baal and bypassed the whole thing.

While the 1st Battalion was held up outside Baal, word was received that tank support was coming. At 2:30 p.m., the 771st's Company C arrived. It immediately launched an attack, using its entire complement of tanks. The 76's fired away over the heads of our own infantry. Both tanks and infantry broke through. In Doveren, the tanks again played a leading role. At first the command tank and two other tanks were cut off in the center of the town. When the infantry was delayed, it was necessary to dismount the crews to protect the tanks. By nightfall, the infantry had gained control of the situation and the tanks were freed to take up positions to the north to guard against counterattacks. Doverhahn was seized by Company C's tanks without infantry support. Meanwhile, the 335th's 2nd Battalion was marching toward Doveren, following the railroad from Baal. It arrived shortly after nightfall, not too late to get into the scrap. The town was burning, snipers were still active, and a counterattack was momentarily awaited.

That night, D-plus-1, February 24, our bridgehead extended from Linnich to Doveren, approximately 4 miles in length. We had driven a wedge into the German positions extending from the eastern edge of Hückelhoven, through Doveren, Doverhahn, and Baal, approximately 3 miles in width. Our flanks were still wide open. The 102nd Infantry Division on our right was held up about 3000 yards behind us and the 35th Infantry Division on our left had not yet jumped off to take Hilfarth and cross the river in its zone. The problems of the crossing, however, were behind us and we were able to turn our full attention to the problem of exploiting our success to the "limit of endurance." We were beginning to look for the right moment to burst out in a full-scale break-through.

D-plus-2

From D-plus-2 on, we had two regiments abreast in the corridor that we were driving toward the north, the 334th Infantry on the east, the 335th Infantry on the west. The regimental picture, however, was more complex than usual. The 333rd's 1st Battalion was attached to the 335th Infantry and the 335th's 3rd Battalion was attached to the 334th Infantry.

Whatever problems we still faced, the enemy was obviously in a much more difficult position. His communications were still so disrupted that sur-

prise remained an important factor on our side. On the night of February 24-25, we received the most striking evidence of the enemy's complete bafflement. At 11 p.m., February 24, our D-plus-1-Day, the 2nd Company, 343rd Infantry, was ordered to move from Hilfarth to take up a defensive position in Doveren. This unit arrived on the scene the next day only to find that Doveren was no longer in German hands. Instead of going into Doveren, it merely organized a defensive position north of the town. One reason Doveren was taken by us without much more trouble was this inability of the German command to keep up with the situation. The system of sending reserve forces to defend threatened points did not work out because these points were frequently not merely threatened—they were captured—by the time the units were able to come within striking distance. Then the units, which had expected to defend, had to attack, or, more likely, would find themselves attacked before they could react to the new situation.

In the case of Doveren, the 2nd Company, 343rd Infantry, did not launch the counterattack at all. The 1st Battalion, 351st Volksgrenadiers, 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, passed through it at about 2:30 a.m. on the morning of February 25 to do the fighting. The enemy's attack was vigorous but it was too little and too late. We already had two full infantry battalions and one full tank company in Doveren. The counterattack was thrown back by an unusually neat triple play which showed the high degree of co-ordination which our infantry-tank-artillery forces had reached.

It was the practice of the 771st Tank Battalion to send one staff officer with a radio to the artillery battalion in direct support of the infantry regiment with which one of the tank companies was working. In this case, the 335th Infantry and the 771st's Company C were involved. This liaison officer stayed in the fire direction center to work in the closest relationship with the artillery. In this way, each tank became a forward observer for the artillery and each tanker could adjust the artillery's fire.

When the 1st Battalion, 351st Volksgrenadiers, hit Doveren, Company C's tanks had radio communication with the infantry but the artillery did not. On the other hand, the tanks could get through to their liaison officer in the fire direction center. For approximately four hours, Captain B. C. Mills of Company C directed artillery fire on the enemy's counterattack and eventually broke it up. By daybreak, Doveren was safe from everything but the enemy's artillery.

Our last difficulty with the bridges also came in the early morning hours of D-plus-2. At 2:30 a.m., February 25, both the infantry support bridge and the treadway bridge were hit by shell fire. The infantry support bridge

had to be repaired before it could be used again but the treadway bridge could still handle 2½-ton trucks without trailers. Soon after, at 4 a.m., the Bailey bridge at Körrenzig was completed so that the heaviest vehicles could cross the river for the first time. At 5:45 a.m., another burst of enemy shell-fire struck seven pontons of the treadway bridge and closed it temporarily. The treadway bridge was repaired by 10:30 a.m., the infantry support bridge by 2 p.m. That was the end of our bridge troubles.

Meanwhile, both the 334th Infantry and the 335th Infantry pushed on, the former from Baal, the latter from Doveren. So much materiel was across that the temporary holdup at the bridges was no handicap. At 9:30 a.m., the 334th's 3rd Battalion jumped off for Granterath, approximately 1000 yards northeast of Baal. At the same time, the 334th's 1st Battalion struck out for Hetzerath, an equal distance due north. At 10 a.m., the 335th's 2nd Battalion pushed on to Houverath, approximately 2000 yards north of Doveren.

The 334th's 3rd Battalion met some resistance from enemy machine guns, a self-propelled gun, and a Mark V tank midway between Baal and Granterath. The 771st's Company A was called up and laid down a base of fire which enabled the infantry to move forward again. Our tanks knocked out a half-track, two self-propelled guns, and the Mark V tank. Company I cleaned out the northern half of Granterath, Company K the southern half. The town was cleared by 2:15 p.m. Infantry resistance inside was light.

Hetzerath was taken by the 334th's 1st Battalion without tank support. Company A was held up in some woods on the way by snipers who, for a change, were remarkably accurate. One man was actually shot in the jaw lying on the ground. But the 334th's 2nd Battalion was moving up in the same general direction and enabled Company A to go on. Company C found an enemy trench which protected it most of the way. About 150 yards from Hetzerath, five enemy machine guns were spotted. All were manned. At our approach, four crews abandoned their guns, the fifth was persuaded by a fling of "marching fire." Once inside, Hetzerath was mopped up by 3:20 p.m.

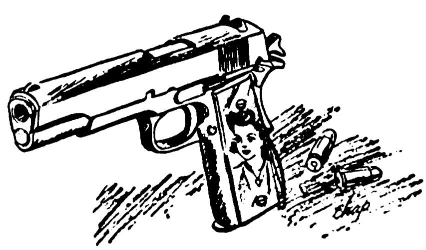
The story of Houverath was told by Captain Francis K. Price, S-3 of the 335th's 2nd Battalion: "I like to tell myself that it was a perfect operation, the sort of thing they dream of at Fort Benning. We moved northeast from Doveren, Company E with a platoon of heavy machine guns from Company H and Company C of the 771st Tank Battalion. Ahead of us was as neat a set of trench works, anti-tank ditches, and obstacles as I have seen. The doughboys double timed, firing as they ran, while from their

flanks the heavy machine guns covered them and over their heads the tanks were spitting lead from their machine guns and 76's. The Jerries in the trenches came out with their hands up and we waved them to the rear."

In front of Houverath was a woods. "As we burst through the woods, a column of six Mark IV tanks was sighted moving down the road from Matzerath to Hetzerath towards the 334th. Captain Mills of the 771st called on the radio and we made up our minds at once. Two platoons of his company swung off to the right and blazed away at this threat to our flank. I ordered one platoon of Company E to hold fast and seal off that flank. But we were moving too fast to be sidetracked from our main effort. The remainder of Company E and the other platoon of tanks took off for Houverath itself. The 76's on the tanks smashed the town to rubble before our very eyes and the doughboys ran right into it." From the woods to the occupation of Houverath was a matter of less than 40 minutes.

Thus on this third day of our drive, we began to detect signs of greatly increasing disintegration in the enemy's ranks. Volkssturm elements were encountered for the first time but were committed as replacements for the 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, not as a unit. This division seemed on the verge of complete disintegration as prisoners from every one of its regiments increased. Many were sent into the line so frantically that they did not know to what company they belonged. Confusion was gradually but unmistakeably setting in.

There were strong indications that the enemy's organized defense extended only as far as Baal and Doveren. At Baal, also, we apparently forced him to displace an important portion of his artillery. He was handicapped, therefore, for two or three days before he could bring his guns into new positions. In any case, we had three days of hard fighting. After D-plus-2, there was a distinct change.



CHAPTER X

The Break-through

THE break-through is probably the special characteristic of modern ground warfare. It has been made possible by the speed and fire power of modern weapons and equipment. It is an unmistakable demonstration that those weapons have been exploited to the full. The German triumph in the west in 1940 was decided by the break-through from Sedan to Abbeville. The Allies turned the tables in 1944 by the break-through from Normandy to the German frontier. Every one of the really decisive victories in this war on both western and eastern fronts has involved at some stage a break-through.

The reason is paradoxical. In modern warfare, both sides are usually able to mass so much force that a knockdown, drag-out fight may end without a real victor. It may be so exhausting that both sides have to give themselves a period of recuperation before they can go at each other again. The margin of victory in a drawn-out, close-in struggle is generally so small that it is not worth the gigantic effort which it demands. A break-through is just the opposite of such a battle of attrition. It achieves the maximum results at a minimum cost. It makes it possible to cover the most ground in the shortest time, bring in the most prisoners, suffer the least casualties, use up the smallest amount of materiel, and run off one map after another. In an encirclement an enemy force can be crushed but a tremendous amount of manpower may be necessary to close all the escape routes and an immense pressure may be applied slowly and painfully as the trapped forces try vainly to break out. In a break-through, the relatively small forces of the leading elements may do nine-tenths of the fighting. They have not overwhelmed the enemy but they have done something much cheaper and much more effective. They have overawed him.

Our advance to Houverath, Hetzerath, and Granterath on February 25 was so convincing that it put the possibility of a break-through on the order of the day. A major break-through was one of the few important

military operations which the 84th had not yet experienced. After the weeks of slugging in the Siegfried Line and the weeks of suffering in the Ardennes, it had a special meaning for us. It was the "pay off." To a soldier who has had to fight for every miserable yard in mud and snow, a fast ride on firm roads, peeling off mile after mile, rarely firing a shot, passing thousands of prisoners, is a joy which seems too perfect for this imperfect world.

D-plus-3

On February 26, the fourth day, we began to do something to achieve a break-through. It was a day of preparation but there was no letup in the fighting. Before we could lash out into the open, we continued to lengthen and broaden our corridor for another 24 hours.

This time the 335th's 3rd Battalion took the lead on the left flank. Company I and a platoon of tanks went for Golkrath, Company K and another tank platoon for Hoven (Map 11). Jumping off from Houverath, Company I was harassed by enemy artillery and mortars all the way. Despite the shelling, the company reported that it crossed the 1200 yards of open ground to Golkrath in six minutes. Inside the town, resistance was light. Golkrath was cleared by noon. Hoven was cleared by Company K 25 minutes later. Later that afternoon, Company L went out of Golkrath to cut the main Erkelenz-Gerderhahn road. The main objective on February 26 of the 102nd Infantry Division on our right flank was Erkelenz. By cutting the road, we helped to isolate Erkelenz.

On the 334th Infantry's side of the corridor, the 2nd Battalion and the 771st's Company A went forward at noon to get Matzerath. No opposition was encountered, but Matzerath will always mean two things to the men who went into it. It was the first town which we overran so quickly that the civilian population was still intact. It was the first town in which beer was found. The era of deserted villages was over. If anything was still necessary to indicate that a break-through was imminent, this was it. The Erkelenz-Gerderhahn road was also cut in the 334th's sector.

A staff meeting was held on the evening of D-plus-3, February 26, to decide how to exploit the enemy's obvious disorganization to the utmost. General Bolling had been playing with the idea for so long that only the details had to be fitted in. The outcome of this meeting was not only a plan but an attitude. Gone were the days when we set our objectives in terms

of yards. We were thinking in miles. Gone were the days when attacks were based on companies, battalions, or even regiments. We were thinking in "task forces," in a combination of all arms, a division in miniature. The modern infantry division has much more than infantry in it and, to that extent, the name may be misleading. Although the infantry is still its basis, every other arm is represented—even the air force in the form of observation planes and an air liaison officer. It is, therefore, not necessary to go outside an infantry division to put together a force which for speed, power, and flexibility may be the equal of any. Such a force was our aim to achieve the break-through.

The result was Task Force Church. It was commanded by the Assistant Division Commander, General Church. It was the first fully motorized task force of the division. Task Force Church was made up of a tank battalion, an infantry regiment, an artillery battalion, an anti-aircraft battery, a tank destroyer company, an engineer company, a medical company, the reconnaissance troop, a detachment of military police, and a signal detachment. It was strong enough to slash through any possible opposition, fast enough to cover the maximum ground in the shortest time, self-sufficient enough to hold out alone if the rest of the division was held up, flexible enough to attack, defend, ride, walk, smash through, or slip through.

Task Force Church moved out in the following formation:

771st Tank Battalion (Company A, 334th Infantry, riding on the leading tanks)
1st Battalion, 334th Infantry (less Company A), motorized
Command Group, Task Force Church
Cannon Company, 334th Infantry
84th Reconnaissance Troop (—) (Remainder of Troop conducted reconnaissance to flanks)
Company B, 309th Engineer (C) Battalion
326th FA Battalion
Battery D, 557th AAA (AW) Battalion
3rd Battalion, 334th Infantry, motorized
Command Group, 334th Infantry
Company A, 637th TD Battalion, reinforced
Special Units, 334th Infantry
Company B, 309th Medical Battalion
2nd Battalion, 334th Infantry

The mission of Task Force Church was published in a Letter of Instruc-

tion, issued at 6 p.m., February 26, and preparations were made the rest of the night to put it into effect. The jump-off was made from Matzerath. The first objective was Wegberg, approximately 5 miles away. The second objective was Waldniel, approximately 10 miles away. After Waldniel, the Rhine was the limit. The 333rd Infantry and the 335th Infantry were told to get ready to follow up by motor on two hours' notice to mop up.

It should be noted that the 334th Infantry in Task Force Church had made the original crossing, had smashed through the crust as far as Baal, and had been fighting for four days with no more than two or three hours sleep a day. Throughout this phase of the operation, our flanks were still open. To have waited for safe flanks, however, would have given the enemy a chance to catch his second wind. In the end, it was safer to drive forward to take advantage of the enemy's distress than to stop for a rest or for more flank protection. There were risks. There always were. But Task Force Church was such a co-ordinated concentration of force that the risks were minimized.

D-plus-4

At 6:50 a.m. on February 27, the big guns began to pound away. The racket, as usual, was terrific. The first target was the village of Lentholt on the other side of the Erkelenz road. The concentration lasted ten minutes. Then Task Force Church took off. It was 7 a.m. The front lines were crossed just north of Hoven. The tanks, doughboys holding on grimly to anything that stuck out of the frames, went first. The entire column stretched out for miles. It was gray and misty.

The tankers fired away at everything that moved. A little anti-tank fire came from the vicinity of Lentholt. Nothing was hit. Just south of Lentholt, the first obstacle was encountered. Steel I-beams were buried in the ground. Two rounds of high explosive failed to clear a passage. A "tank dozer" battered down the beams. Another road block was beaten down in the center of Lentholt. A battery of 75's was parked, unguarded, in one street; the crews were still asleep in some nearby building. After Lentholt, the road was remarkably clear. Prisoners began to stream to the rear. It was impossible to guard them; they were simply waved back; they were disappointed because they could not ride to the cage. So many towns were passed so quickly without a shot, without a stop, without the slightest incident to

set off one from another that no one knew their names. The 771st Tank Battalion's commander, Lt. Col. Jack C. Childers, commented: "It was just a wild ride from one town to another." To GI's it was "a rat race.

The experiences of the 84th Reconnaissance Troop in one town were typical. As the main column moved forward on the highway, the troop roamed around the flanks, investigating side roads and villages. Outside the town of Holtum, a full battery of 88's, eight guns, was overrun. Not a single German soldier was near them. The missing crewmen were found in the town. The jeeps and an armored car went in first. Two Germans, attracted by the noise, stuck their heads out of a window. They were waved outside. Thirteen more followed. In a few minutes, the street was full of prisoners, about 250 of them, including the entire staff of an artillery battalion. A bewildered German major, rudely interrupted eating, confessed that he had no idea our forces were anywhere near, explaining the lack of precautions.

The first stop of Task Force Church was Wegberg. It was approximately 8:30 a.m. Compared to our pace the first four days, this advance—5 miles in an hour and a half—was already a break-through. In some towns the tanks moved at a speed of 25 miles per hour. At the northern outskirts of Wegberg, however, a railroad underpass was skillfully demolished. Company B's tanks were permitted to go through, the underpass was blown, the debris blocked the main road. Engineers were rushed forward to clear the way but it was almost noon before the advance was resumed.

A German supply train of approximately 15 wagons was encountered between Wegberg and Rickelrath. The tankers made a bedlam of the place. Their machine guns and 76's fired away at the wagons, horses bolted, wagon tongues were split against trees, vehicles smashed into each other, goods splashed all over the street, horses reared and screamed in pain. Company B stayed in Rickelrath for three-quarters of an hour while the rear of the column caught up. The only opposition at this point was offered by a single German soldier with a Schmeiser machine pistol. He came out of a troop shelter while the tanks were stationary and fired on them. A round of high explosive was sent at him. He disappeared.

The caravan moved forward again. The first real opposition was met in the vicinity of Steeg, a little village about 1500 yards southeast of Waldniel, at approximately 2 p.m. (Map 12). So far we had not lost a single tank. An enemy anti-tank gun at a road junction near Steeg knocked out the lead tank. The 334th's Company A jumped off the tanks to deal with it. A

bazooka eliminated the gun. The doughboys climbed back on the tanks, the column woke up again, but the new lead tank was not able to move more than 5 feet before it was struck by another anti-tank gun. It was evident that the enemy had organized some sort of defense of that road junction. At about 3 p.m., it was decided to commit the entire 1st Battalion, 334th Infantry, against the threat which amounted to four anti-tank guns and five assault guns.

Meanwhile, the "rear" areas of the column were also warm. An experience of General Church showed how fluid the situation could be 3-4 miles behind the tank spearhead.

When the column was held up near Steeg, General Church decided to go up there to see for himself. His party was made up of three jeeps, his own, an I & R jeep, and a third, some distance behind, with two newspaper correspondents. About 400 yards north of Wegberg a burst of fire suddenly came from the I & R jeep. A German soldier was firing back 10 feet away from a ditch. About 300 yards farther, eight more were dug in along the road. Two jeeps raced past, everyone shooting, hoping this was an isolated, die-hard group of Germans. When still more enemy riflemen were encountered, however, it was decided to go back because it was impossible to tell how many more were waiting along the road. Meanwhile, the correspondents had turned back at the first sign of trouble to bring help.

By turning around, General Church's jeep became the leading vehicle. Halfway through the first pocket of resistance, the two jeeps were caught in heavy fire from the other side of the road. On the way up, they had not noticed that both sides of the road were alive with Germans. General Church's car was hit and reeled. The driver, T/5 Kyser Crockett, said: "I've lost my arm," as he slumped in his seat, trying to keep his foot on the accelerator. The general's aide, Lt. Norman D. Dobie, leaned over from the back seat and steered the jeep through the fire. General Church's automatic blazed away. Only after they had successfully run the gauntlet did Lt. Dobie notice that General Church's face and clothes were streaked with blood. A doctor examined General Church in the temporary headquarters at the southern edge of Wegberg and found that fragments had hit him below the eyebrow, around the knee, and the most serious one in the ankle. T/5 Crocket suffered a complex fracture of the forearm. General Church's experience did not prevent him from moving about and he finished the entire drive to the Rhine.

The fight against the anti-tank guns took up the rest of the day. When

darkness set in and the movement of our armor was restricted, the infantry organized a defense line south of Steeg. The first day of Task Force Church was finished.

What was our achievement? On February 27, the 84th Infantry Division led the Allied armies in the drive to the Rhine. Its break-through was the first of its kind by any division, armored or infantry, in the battle of Germany. By running away with the enemy, we had also run away from our friends. Flanks that day were simply forgotten. On February 27, the 102nd Infantry Division and the 5th Armored Division on our right had seized Rheindahlen, approximately 5 miles behind us. The 35th Infantry Division on our left had taken Gerderhahn, approximately 7 miles behind us.

After the deep penetration of Task Force Church, the 335th Infantry on the left and the 333rd Infantry on the right proceeded to mop up scattered enemy units, including the 4th Battalion, 1176th FA Regiment (150 mm. howitzers), and a searchlight battery, both complete with equipment intact. In the 9-mile sweep, 54 towns and villages were overrun. The enemy's casualties for the day were estimated at 100 killed, 50 wounded, and 1249 prisoners—completely reversing the ordinary proportions of casualties. The enemy's equipment captured, damaged, or destroyed amounted to 12 FA guns, 8 88 mm. AA/AT guns, 2 assault guns, 17 motor vehicles, and 15 horse-drawn wagons. At Beeck, southeast of Wegberg, one of the most important enemy maps ever to fall into Allied hands while its information was still current was discovered. A member of the wire section of the 327th FA Battalion, Pfc. R. O. Davis, found the map, showing the exact location of all German units on the western front, in the headquarters of the 12th SS Corps which was abandoned so hastily that even such maps were left behind. The map was forwarded to SHAEF headquarters in Paris in a few hours.

The human aspects of a major break-through have a special interest, especially the prisoners and the civilian population.

Our total bag of prisoners in the Siegfried Line in five weeks of continuous fighting was 1548. Our total bag of prisoners in the Ardennes in four weeks of continuous fighting was 1503. In a single day, February 27, we took in 1249. Not that any particular effort was made to gather in prisoners during the break-through. None was necessary. Hordes simply decided that the war was over for them and started marching in column to the rear. Most of these pessimistic characters were not fighting men. They were clerks, shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, butchers. Some were just handed rifles and told to defend a ditch which they never found. Others

were caught as we overran rear echelons. Artillerymen were also unusually numerous. Replacement units were captured intact before they could turn themselves into combat units. In fact, cohesive units with definite sectors were unknown. The remnants seemed to amount to groups of men thrown together wherever they could be found. It was almost useless to pump prisoners for information. They were confused, stunned, ignorant. All they knew was that we were not supposed to be where we were. That was one reason so little fight was put up. They were demoralized, and demoralized soldiers do not fight.

The break-through was also the beginning of the civilian problem. For our soldiers, an intact town, even an intact house, was a new phenomenon. Until the break-through, war was destruction. To take a neat and comfortable town and then to be able to live in it was something unreal. The break-through was more like maneuvers than the combat we had known. For the German civilians, the lightning appearance of American tanks, trucks, jeeps, live, hardened, American soldiers was at first a cause of frantic alarm. Many tried to escape from the fighting and jammed the roads until they were told to stay in their homes. Actually, the fighting was going away from them—and so fast—that they soon settled down. Of all the evidence of the break-through, one fact was perhaps the most eloquent, the most revealing. In every town, it was possible to go into a house which had been abandoned by German officers or by civilians with a guilty conscience and find a meal half-eaten on the table or cooking on the stove. "Civilians were amazed," S/Sgt. Ambrose Cerrito, Company C, 334th Infantry, said. "We caught them all completely by surprise. Food was on all the tables. People were still coming home from work. Everyone from three-year-olds up immediately began waving white handkerchiefs when they saw who we were. Apparently they were told we would kill them all. They were so scared that all they wanted was to move out and get away from us. The majority of them did not even take time to pick up a few belongings."

"Some civilians were stony-faced, some had tears in their eyes," Lt. Clifton L. MacLachlan, Assistant S-3, 334th Infantry, said. "I fell asleep in a ditch about 500 yards short of the road junction south of Waldniel. I was awakened by a German woman carrying a baby stumbling over me to get out of some machine gun fire. You could see anything that day, every possible expression of surprise on faces, old men pulled in wheelbarrows, women carrying babies. You could grab something to eat on half the tables and stoves. Majors had to be kicked out of bed to be taken prisoners."

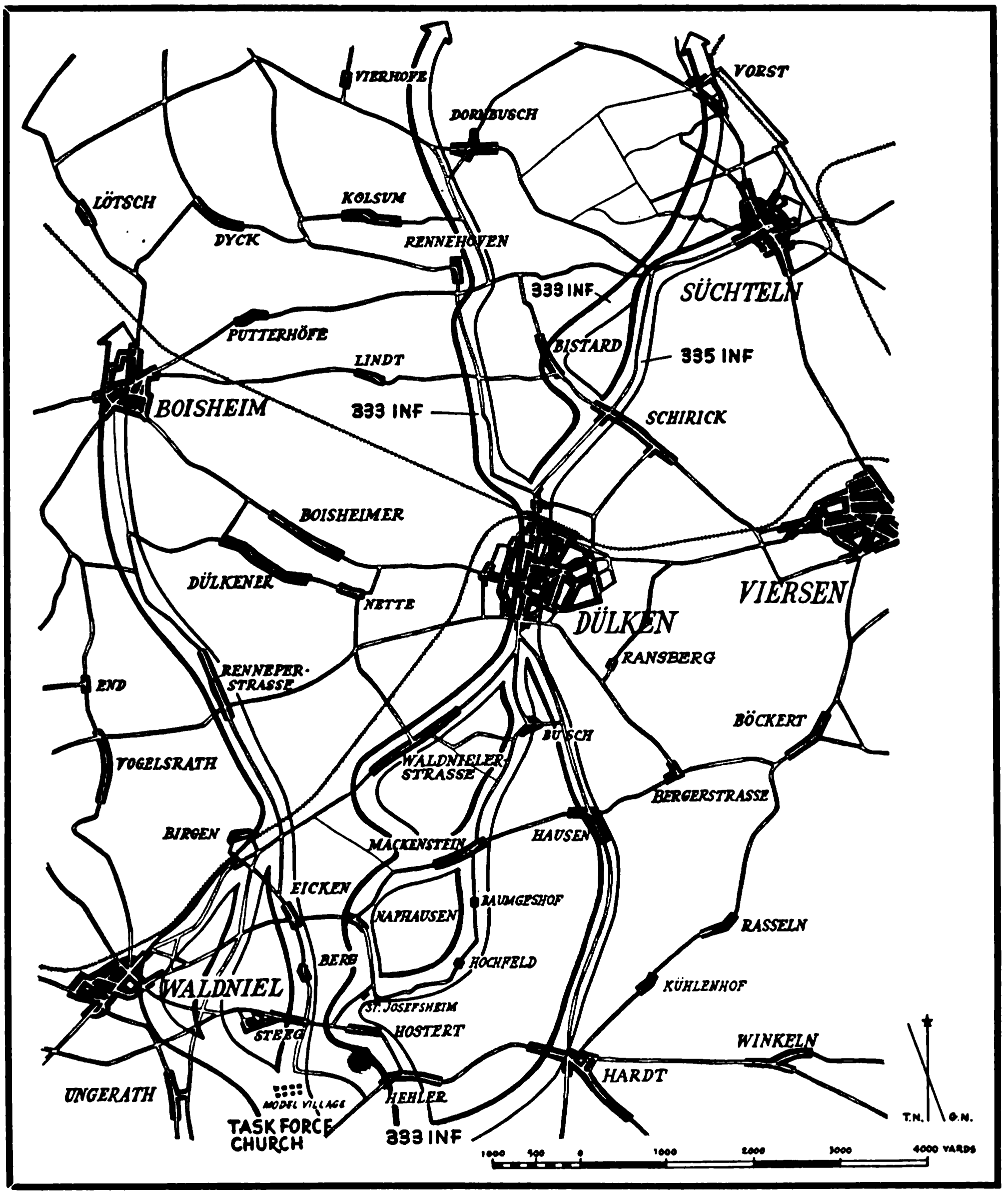
Full credit for the first break-through in Germany was given to the 84th in the entire American press the next day. Most of the reports played up the fact that an infantry division, rather than an armored division, had slashed through first, though some neglected to mention that tanks had led the way for us, too. The Associated Press said that "the German lines fell apart yesterday under a 9 mile thrust by motorized infantry of the Eighty-fourth Division." *The New York Times* noted that "it was not even an armored spearhead that made the greatest gain of the day on the Ninth Army front but an infantry column of the Eighty-fourth Division." The Army's own *Stars and Stripes* wrote that "in one sector of what was modestly called a 'fluid' front in official reports, the 84th's 334th Reg. had even outrun the tanks." Actually, the 84th's tanks outran all the other tanks.

D-plus-5

At Waldniel, the quality of the opposition changed. The Waldniel-Hardt road was the boundary between the enemy's Fifteenth Army and his First Paratroop Army. The latter was fully committed in the British-Canadian sector farther north but it was forced to rush some forces down to meet our penetration in its rear. With the exception of a few stragglers from the 176th and 183rd Volksgrenadier Divisions, the enemy's resistance north of the Waldniel-Hardt road was offered by units of the 8th Paratroop Division which had been withdrawn from as far north as Arnhem and Venlo.

The first evidence of stiffer resistance had come at the end of Task Force Church's break-through on February 27 at the Steeg road junction. At 9:45 a.m. the next morning, February 28 or D-plus-5, the attack jumped off again in an effort to clear the way for another big push. The 334th's 1st Battalion was working with Company C, 771st Tank Battalion, the 2nd Battalion with Company A's tanks. It was soon found that a strong enemy position had been built up in the villages around Waldniel with permanently emplaced 88's, dug-in tanks, mines, and machine guns, and paratroopers who were much more willing than the volksgrenadiers to fight.

A combination of dismounted infantry, mortars, and cannon company 105's succeeded in forcing a way through the road junction of Steeg only to hit another heavily defended crossroads at the southern outskirts of Waldniel. Seven enemy tanks were dug in, protected by machine guns and mines. Again the infantry and supporting fire had to exert slow pressure to



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remove the block. Late in the afternoon, the eastern edges of Waldniel were cleared. The 335th's 1st Battalion, which followed up in Waldniel, had to fight for 12 hours to clear out the whole city.

The heaviest fighting of the day took place for the tiny village of Berg,

about a mile east of Waldniel, against a paratroop outfit that happened to be refitting there. Berg was important because it straddled the main road to our next important objective, Boisheim. By taking Berg, we could attack Boisheim and mop up in Waldniel simultaneously. It was the bloodiest battle since Baal and earned a presidential unit citation for Company G, and Company H's 2nd Platoon, 334th Infantry.

Company G, its strength reduced to 125 men, led off for the 334th's 2nd Battalion. It started out from a group of cottages near Wegberg, known as a "model village." To reach the road to Berg, it was necessary to cross 300 yards of open field. Near the highway, four enemy machine guns opened up. One was off to the right of the main road, the other three behind a slope to the front. Lt. Harold L. Howdieshell, whose battlefield commission was still very strange and new, had both his scouts with him, about 25 yards ahead of the company. He spotted the machine gun that was hitting the 1st Platoon. It was off to the right. He pushed his scouts into the ditch beside the road and pegged four hand grenades at the gun. It was not heard from again. Just as he was about to pull the pin from a fifth grenade, another machine gun cut loose at him. He died instantly.

The second machine gun was located. It was firing from a low-slung, one-story building. A stream of bullets forced the 1st Platoon to hug the ground. Gradually, about half the platoon managed to crawl up to a sugar beet mound which provided some protection. Lt. Jack F. Schaper crawled around the mound to observe the position of the gun. Just as his head was far enough out to get a view, he was hit, a head wound. The same gun scored twice more.

The company commander, Captain Charles E. Hiatt, decided to send his 2nd Platoon on a flanking movement through a patch of woods and knock out the gun from the left side. This platoon picked up 15 prisoners in the woods, every one an officer or noncom. The house was rushed and the second machine gun was eliminated. A high German officer was found at the helm of a double-barreled gun. From that building, the German defense was sized up. The second gun had covered the crest of the slope behind which the Germans were dug in. It was a perfect reverse slope defense. Machine gun fire covered every avenue of approach but, with two guns out, it was possible to storm the crest of the slope and land on the Germans dug in behind.

At first, progress was slow and hard. One enemy machine gun continued to cut all around Company G. Burp guns and small arms fire added to the

danger. They hugged their side of the slope, waiting for the fire to quiet down. Everyone took a turn, raised himself up for a moment, let go with a slug, snapped back to the ground for safety. Suddenly someone said: "To hell with this! Let's rush 'em!" They charged up the crest of the slope, bayonets fixed. They sprang into the trenches, arms, bayonets, and hand grenades flying. The Germans were paratroopers and fought back gamely. Only two were left to be captured when it was all over.

The hill was taken but Berg was still left. The road was clear. In a house-to-house roundup in Berg, 75 prisoners were taken. Most of them had changed into civilian clothes. Captain Hiatt reported by radio to battalion: "We're moving on to our next objective." It was Eicken, about 750 yards away.

The mortars laid down a small preparatory barrage. This time the 2nd Platoon took the brunt of the enemy's resistance. It was Berg all over again. The Germans had the route of approach covered with the cross fire of three machine guns. An 88 was dug in with two machine guns to the front. The 2nd Platoon assaulted the guns in open ground. The 88 was firing flat, point-blank. Even two medics were cut down. Pfc. Victor W. King administered first aid to eight wounded men in a storm of machine gun fire. He tried unsuccessfully to get to more. S/Sgt. Artis C. Britton decided it was just as dangerous to stay in the open as to rush the 88. Once in range, he hurled two hand grenades at the guns. The Germans sent back two potato mashers. Britton threw two more grenades. Wounded, he scored both times. Nevertheless, it was still sticky to get the news back. Pfc. Cleatus W. Ewton came back across the field, a stream of machine gun fire chasing him, and lost consciousness after he was barely able to say, "We got 'em. You can go."

The 3rd Platoon took the road into Eicken. After 200 yards, another machine gun, beautifully concealed in a haystack, woke up. The platoon dropped into a drainage ditch along the road. Unfortunately, the ditch was made up of culverts, spaced about 25 yards apart. At every culvert, it was necessary to get up above the ditch and the machine gunner went to work. Captain Hiatt pulled himself to the ditch and took the lead. The last culvert led to the first house in Eicken. In Eicken, the men wanted to snuff out the last machine gun. A five-man patrol worked its way back to the haystack. Four men kept the gunner busy with small arms fire while a fifth, Pfc. Max L. State, crept around to the rear, took a match out of his pocket, and set the hay afire. The burning haystack took care of that. At least 200

paratroopers took part in the battles of Berg and Eicken. Half of them were captured and the others were found in very bad shape or no shape at all.

In the Open Again

Thus, after the unprecedented advance on February 27, we were slowed down the next morning and afternoon and had moved only about 2 miles by dusk. The fighting at Berk and Eicken resembled the Siegfried Line much more than the break-through. Not so long ago, an advance of 2 miles was considered a good day's work but times had changed. Now it was a source of worry and annoyance. Our flanks were still wide open. The 102nd Infantry Division on our right had advanced as far as Hardt, approximately 1500 yards behind us. The 8th Armored Division on our left took Merbeck, approximately 5000 yards behind us. Yet it was clear that, given an opportunity, the enemy might succeed in organizing a temporary position which would stabilize the front or at least threaten to do so. Another moment of decision had come.

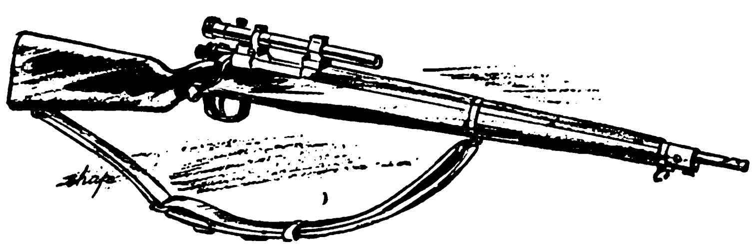
Task Force Church was supposed to be dissolved at 8 p.m., February 28, but in view of the progress that day, a verbal order postponed the dissolution in order to send it forward again that very night. We had caught the enemy off balance and we intended to keep him that way. To do so, we had to gamble on the unexpected again. After six days of continuous advance, the enemy might have been pardoned for assuming that we were entitled to a rest, at least for one night. Moreover, there was reason to suspect that the Germans were fairly convinced that the United States Army did not like to attack at night. As it happened, the 84th had frequently attacked at night—the Roer crossing was a case in point—if the advantages seemed to outweigh the disadvantages. The 771st's commander, Lt. Col. Childers, remarked: "There is a great advantage in moving at night. We can't see the enemy but neither can he see us. During the drive to the Rhine, we had little difficulty with this system."

And so, in the middle of the night, at 1:30 a.m., March 1, the column began to move again. The attack on Boisheim was spearheaded by the 334th's 3rd Battalion and the 771st's Company A. It was one of the easiest and quickest victories in our experience. The surprise was absolute. About 300 yards out of Boisheim, Company K, in the lead, stopped to take care of two anti-tank guns. The information was given to them by a child at a

farmhouse. The guns were seized without protest. Boisheim itself was asleep. In order to take prisoners, GIs had to raid houses on a grand scale. Boisheim produced more prisoners in bed than any other place in the drive. By 6:30 a.m., March 1, Boisheim was ours. Yet, the approaches to Boisheim were covered by anti-tank guns with excellent fields of fire. These weapons might have given us as much trouble as the guns at the approaches to Waldniel but that night they were not even manned.

Boisheim is a convenient midway point to look back at the entire drive. In six days, the 84th Infantry Division had advanced 20 miles from the Roer. Two-thirds of that distance was covered in the last two days. In this period, 2876 prisoners were captured. At the same time, the total of prisoners of the XIII Corps was 6444 and it was 11,624 for the Ninth Army. The 84th was responsible, therefore, for 44 per cent of the Corps' total and 24 per cent of the Army's total.

In retrospect, the crossing seems remarkably easy, the pursuit remarkably successful, the enemy's disintegration remarkably advanced. If so, the credit must go to the painstaking planning, preparation, and training for every move; the co-ordination of all arms, especially the infantry, armor, artillery, and engineers; and the extraordinary demands which our men made on themselves in the chase. If the enemy had been permitted to reorganize his positions even once, there might have been a different story.



CHAPTER XI

At the Rhine

BOISHEIM was one of the turning points in the drive to the Rhine. From the Roer to Boisheim, we were traveling northward instead of eastward. The enemy was fooled because we seemed to be going away from the Rhine, our obvious objective, and his disposition of troops and defenses were primarily aimed to defend the Rhine against a drive to the east. This northward direction, however, enabled us to break out of the area of the enemy's prepared defenses in a relatively short time and to strike out into relatively open country in which armor was most effective. We had fine roads to roll on. We were cutting across corps and even armies, always at the weakest points, so that by the time the element of surprise was lost in one zone we were able to take advantage of it in another.

When Boisheim was reached, it was clear that a change of direction was indicated in order to confuse the enemy once more. After 20 miles of the northward push, it was safe to assume that the Germans had adjusted themselves to the threat from that direction. At Boisheim, therefore, the drive was suddenly twisted to the east. There was reason to suspect that the enemy might be surprised again by the change in direction and that he would again permit us to maneuver behind his lines. The great advantage of this strategy was that it forced the enemy to fight on our terms, not us on his. It was a complete reversal of the situation in the Siegfried Line.

By turning east from Boisheim, we expected to reach the Rhine in the vicinity of Uerdingen, near the large industrial center of Krefeld (Map 11). From Boisheim to Uerdingen was another 20 miles. At Uerdingen, the Rhine made a horseshoe curve to the west, thereby bringing it closer to us. In order that we might use the most direct route, the northern half of Krefeld was included in the 84th's zone, though we intended to bypass Krefeld if possible in order to get to the river without delay. According to reconnaissance photos, the highway bridge at Uerdingen was still in operat-

ing condition. We had orders to seize it, cross it, and establish a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Rhine.

Such was the position on March 1 as we looked back at the Roer and forward to the Rhine from the town of Boisheim. Our men were tired, but men who were going forward as fast as we were could take a lot more tiredness than men who had to slug it out for a few yards a day.

D-plus-5 Again

As far as Boisheim, the leading infantry unit in our advance was the 334th Infantry, although the other two regiments had plenty to do. They were following on foot, mopping up behind the tanks and trucks and jeeps. Whereas Task Force Church had driven a thin line through the enemy's territory on the main road, the follow-up forces had to negotiate a good deal of cross country, sometimes through thick woods. How thin that line was in some places was best illustrated by a sign prepared by some members of Task Force Church: "Road and Shoulders Only Cleared of Krauts." The fact that another regiment was able to take over the pursuit as soon as the 334th was given a slight rest was in itself an important achievement.

It is necessary to go back in order to catch up with the 333rd Infantry which took over the advance from the 334th.

The follow-up of the 333rd shows how and why the foot troops were never too far behind the motorized task force, one of the basic reasons why the pursuit never had to bog down. On the morning of February 27, the 333rd's 1st Battalion was still in Matzerath, behind Task Force Church which had started its spectacular career from Matzerath earlier that morning. At 10:15 a.m. the battalion was ordered to move north toward Beeck, 4 miles away. Beeck had everything from pistols to 88's but resistance was slight and 250 prisoners were collected. It was 3:30 p.m. A half hour later, the battalion was again ordered to move, this time cross country through a cluster of thick woods. The new objective was the Hehler-Hardt road, another 4 miles from Beeck.

A few incidents livened up the march. At Gripekoven, 1200 yards northeast of Beeck, a complete field artillery battery was overrun. About 100 men, including mortars and light machine guns, were defending the battery. Company B drew their fire from the front while Company A and Company C outflanked them and hit them from the rear. The whole force

surrendered but succeeded in destroying some of the guns. At midnight, near Genhodder, midway between Beeck and Hehler, three enemy tanks and about 50 infantrymen were seen fleeing east. They stopped to put up some token resistance but soon continued on their flight. Without further interruption, the 1st Battalion arrived at its destination, the Hehler-Hardt section of the road, at about 4:30 a.m. on February 28. It was still dark. The battalion was able to move into the area before daylight without attracting much resistance. In fact, a German military school was overrun southwest of Hardt. Its cooks were just preparing breakfast.

The situation on the morning of February 28 was, from one point of view, unusually interesting. In effect, by getting to the road that morning, the foot troops of the 333rd were catching up with the motorized troops of Task Force Church. The tanks of Task Force Church moved from Matzerath to Steeg in about seven hours; the foot troops of the 333rd's 1st Battalion moved from Matzerath to Hehler in about 18 hours. The tanks rolled on first-class roads whereas the foot troops had to march cross country, stopping only long enough to clean up a few pockets of resistance. Since the tanks were held up at Steeg, however, the foot troops came to the road in time to help out the attack all along the line. On the morning of February 28, therefore, a general push was launched between Steeg and Hardt (Map 12). Hardt itself was in the 102nd Infantry Division's zone but it was also one of our problems because it was the anchor of the enemy's line.

As daylight came in, the 1st Battalion began to get more and more resistance. Most of the enemy's fire, both artillery and small arms, was coming from Hardt, which the 102nd Infantry Division had not yet been able to clear. As a result, while the 334th Infantry was engaging in heavy fighting to clear the way at Steeg, the 333rd Infantry was involved in the same kind of in-fighting farther east on the right flank.

The plan had called for the 333rd's 1st Battalion to secure the road, then to be passed through by the 3rd Battalion to deliver the next blow. By the time the 3rd Battalion had reached the road, however, it was caught in the same fire as the 1st Battalion and had to fight hard to free itself. About two enemy companies were dug in, blocking the way.

The 333rd's 3rd Battalion was teamed with the 771st's Company B for the attack. They went through Hehler without difficulty, despite some sniper fire. North of Hehler, however, the tanks bogged down in mud and the infantry went forward alone. Company K took the right flank, Company I the left.

Company K had to cross about 400 yards of open ground to get to Hochfeld from a clump of woods. Hochfeld was held by 70 paratroopers, all armed with automatic weapons. In addition, heavier guns farther back were helping out. Two 75 mm. guns were shooting at Company K from Baumgeshof, as were two 88 mm. guns from Mackenstein and two self-propelled guns from the road between Baumgeshof and Mackenstein. The fire was hot and the company was flat on the ground.

Lt. William D. Masters started running toward Hochfeld with a carbine in one hand and a radio in the other. A German machine gunner blocked his entrance into the town. They exchanged a series of shots, both missed, both ran out of ammunition at precisely the same time. Lt. Masters calmly stopped, knelt on one knee, reloaded. Again they looked up at the same time, but this time Lt. Masters fired first. He put a bullet between the machine gunner's eyes. When Lt. Masters took off his helmet, he found a bullet through it.

While the carbine was fighting the machine gun, S/Sgt. Jeremiah H. Dunne was leading his squad of eight over to the right flank about 200 yards away to a single farmhouse, held by six Germans, three of them armed with submachine guns. The squad rushed the house, killed two and captured the rest. These two blows seemed to break the back of the resistance in Hochfeld because the rest of the company was able to advance and take the town, killing about 20 and capturing the others.

Meanwhile, Company I was getting some fire across the Hehler-Hardt road but was able to get as far as the insane asylum at St. Josefsheim without too much trouble. The Germans were backing up to Naphausen as we advanced. In the first group of houses in Naphausen were about 20 paratroopers who used small arms and mortars to hold off Company I. They were driven off and Company I advanced as far as some houses across the road which branched off to Mackenstein. Here heavy enemy fire from the northern edge of Naphausen held them up and tanks were called for. Three tanks came up and blasted away at everything in sight. By 2 p.m., Naphausen was cleared and the company dug in for the day.

And so, February 28 was a day of hard fighting all along the Waldniel-Hardt road. The 334th had succeeded in pushing as far as Eicken, the 333rd Infantry as far as Naphausen. That night, however, the 334th took part in the drive of Task Force Church which broke through to Boisheim, whereas the 333rd waited until the next morning to strike again.

D-plus-6

The 333rd Infantry had used its 1st Battalion to get to the road and its 3rd Battalion to break the crust of resistance above the road. It was now the turn of its 2nd Battalion to cash in. The main objective was Dülken, about 5000 yards north of the road.

A 20-minute artillery preparation ended at 6 a.m., March 1. The 2nd Battalion jumped off. Opposition at Mackenstein was scattered. After cleaning it up, Company G went on to Busch. Meanwhile, Company F had bypassed Mackenstein and was nearing Waldnielerstrasse. By moving parallel to the town for a short distance, then suddenly shifting directions, Company F was able to enter Waldnielerstrasse in three columns, trapping many Germans who were fighting a rear guard action. At Busch, Company G encountered heavy artillery and mortar fire but a direct assault netted an 88 that had fired point-blank at them, an anti-tank gun, and the town itself. The 2nd Battalion controlled the two main roads to Dülken.

At 10 a.m., a public address system of the psychological warfare branch was set up in the northernmost house in Busch. The battalion commander, Lt. Col. Daniel P. Norman, gave the German garrison in Dülken one hour to surrender. Masses of civilians heeded the call immediately but the soldiers were less willing—or able. An answer was not received until the ultimatum had expired—no. At 11 a.m., the artillery again plastered the town for five minutes. Companies F and G moved down the roads leading from Waldnielerstrasse and Busch into Dülken. Road blocks defended by 75 mm. and 88 mm. anti-tank guns were knocked out. The attack was so rapid that Company E, the reserve element, was mopping up in 30 minutes. The forward companies, however, ran into heavier enemy artillery fire at the northern edge of Dülken. From high ground in the villages of Schirick and Bistard, 88's were blocking the way to Süchteln, the next objective.

At this point, still another battalion joined in to push the pursuit. While the 333rd's 2nd Battalion moved around Süchteln on the western side, the 335th's 2nd Battalion went into Süchteln itself (Map 12). It should be emphasized that the 335th was moving on foot, without the assistance of tanks or reconnaissance troops for most of this operation, and yet it was able to move up with the motorized columns and to take over the chase on the shortest notice.

The 333rd's 2nd Battalion went out of Dülken first. Company F moved down the road to Bistard. A platoon of tanks from the 771st's Company B

helped out. Whenever heavy small arms fire was encountered, the tanks would move ahead and wipe out the opposition. Whenever anti-tank guns were met, the infantry would leapfrog forward and knock them out, permitting the tanks to advance. Company G and another tank platoon took care of Schirick the same way. By the time both towns were cleared, it was dusk.

The 335th's 2nd Battalion moved down the main road from Dülken to Süchteln and passed the 333rd's 2nd Battalion as Company F was fighting for Bistard. In front of Süchteln was a huge, natural quarry on both sides of the road which had been extended to form an enormous anti-tank ditch. A fairly broad canal linked the two quarries across the road and the bridge crossing the canal had, of course, been blown. All the vehicles, including the tanks of the 771st's Company C, had to be left behind and the foot troops crossed the ditch alone.

Süchteln was taken in the dark. It was practically undefended. Two or three enemy automatic weapons were set up at street corners; the gunners gave up or ran at the first sight of serious trouble. Only a handful of prisoners were captured—but one of them was good for a laugh. Doughboys were moving slowly down one of the town's main streets when a civilian automobile rounded a corner and approached them. In the car was a German major who had been sent to organize the defense of Süchteln—but his troops were not scheduled to arrive for a week! His chief reaction was amazement. He insisted that he had no idea American forces were anywhere near—this despite the heavy firing all day north of Dülken which was less than 3 miles away. In any case, Süchteln was cleared by 10 p.m., March 1.

Meanwhile, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion was moving up on the western side of Süchteln. Company G and two tank platoons of the 771st's Company B moved out of Schirick only to strike the anti-tank ditch. Anti-tank guns covered the ditch. Leaving the tanks, Company G's men crossed the ditch behind a chemical smoke screen and surprised the enemy gunners on the other side. At the crossroads west of Süchteln, the company stopped. Company F left Bistard, turned right, and tied into Company G. Then Companies G and E stepped out again to flush out some woods north of the crossroads west of Süchteln, and went as far as the outskirts of Dornbusch.

It was late that night before the 333rd's 2nd Battalion was through. The day's advance had carried the battalion off their maps and the company commanders had to use enemy maps or none at all. The battalion covered about 8 miles in less than 18 hours, always on foot, sometimes through dense

woods. Twenty-one towns and villages were captured and eight anti-tank and 88 mm. guns knocked out. On the night of March 1, then, the bulk of the division was concentrated in the Süchteln-Dülken-Boisheim triangle, ready for the sharp turn to the northeast to hit the Rhine at the Uerdingen bend, still about 15 miles away.

D-plus-7

At Süchteln, we were faced with another water crossing, a relatively minor one but enough to hold up our vehicles until bridges were put in. In our zone, the Niers Canal ran from south to north in three and sometimes in as many as five channels (Map 11). We planned to make a crossing at two places, one in the vicinity of Süchteln and the other in the vicinity of Oedt, about 3 miles north. At Oedt, we had to cross three channels, two on the west side of the town, one on the east side. This crossing was planned to protect our left flank as we pushed westward from Süchteln. At Süchteln, we had three channels to cross too but, once over, we could take advantage of the main road which led through Vorst, St. Tonis, and Krefeld to the Rhine at Uerdingen.

All the bridges at both places were blown but there was one bridge in between that we were able to capture intact. The problems at both Süchteln and Oedt were similar. The first canal was 36 feet wide but the water was only 3½ feet deep. The second canal was very small and could be forded easily. The third canal was approximately the same as the first one but it was guarded by anti-tank obstacles in the form of wooden railroad ties. Thus it was possible to cross infantry troops immediately, but to get the supporting armor across involved some delay. Engineers estimated that it would take 3½ to 4 hours to build the bridges.

In general, the crossings at Oedt were made by the 333rd Infantry, those at Süchteln by the 335th Infantry. Both were fully over by March 2 or D-plus-7.

At Süchteln, the 335th's 2nd Battalion reached a bridge over the canal, about 800 yards east of the town, at about 3 a.m. on March 2. The infantry waded across and established a bridgehead about 600 yards deep so that the engineers could get to work on another bridge. By morning, the regiment was ready to push on again.

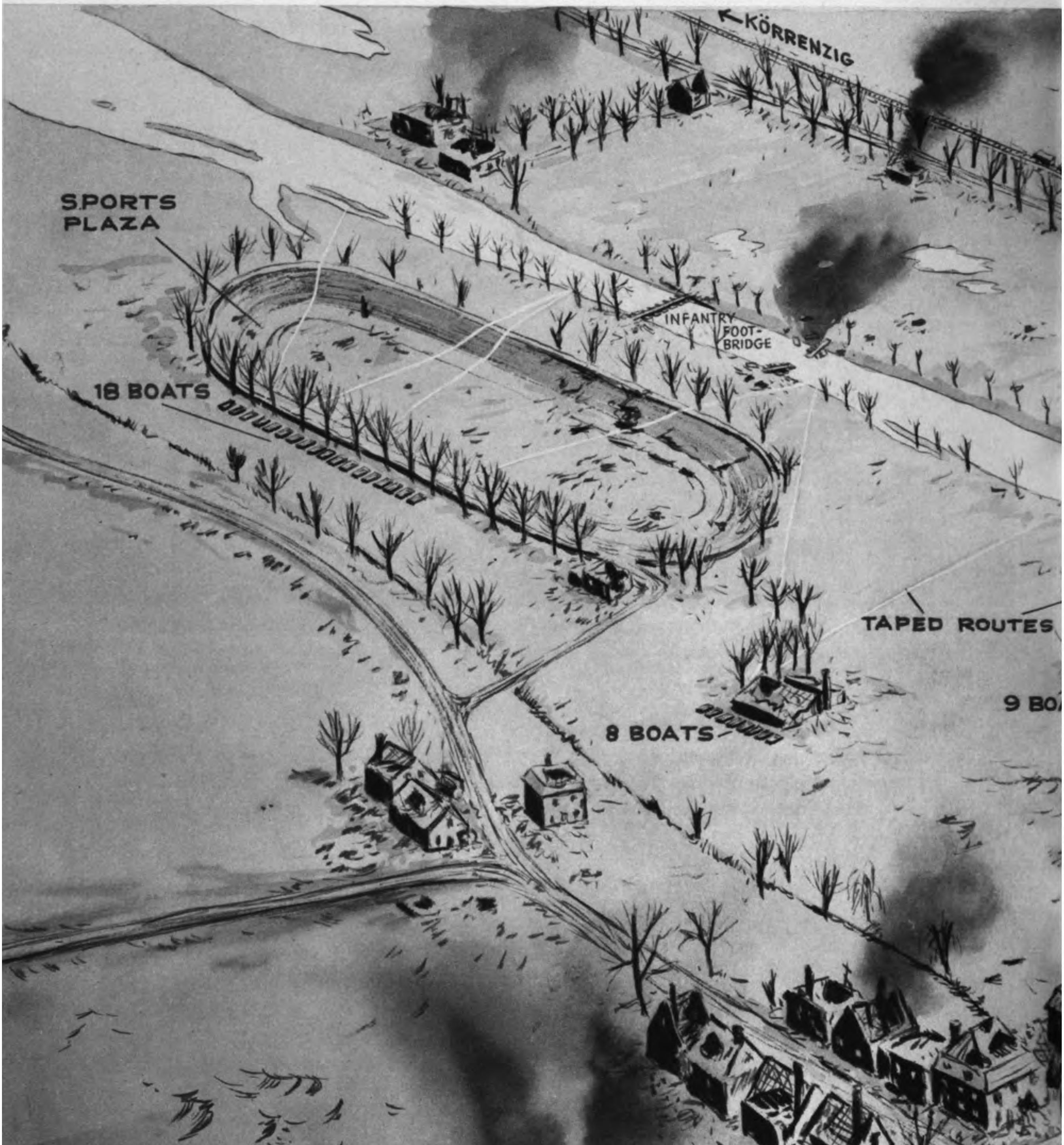
Between Süchteln and Oedt, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion was sent out to capture the only bridge in the area that was still intact. The battalion left



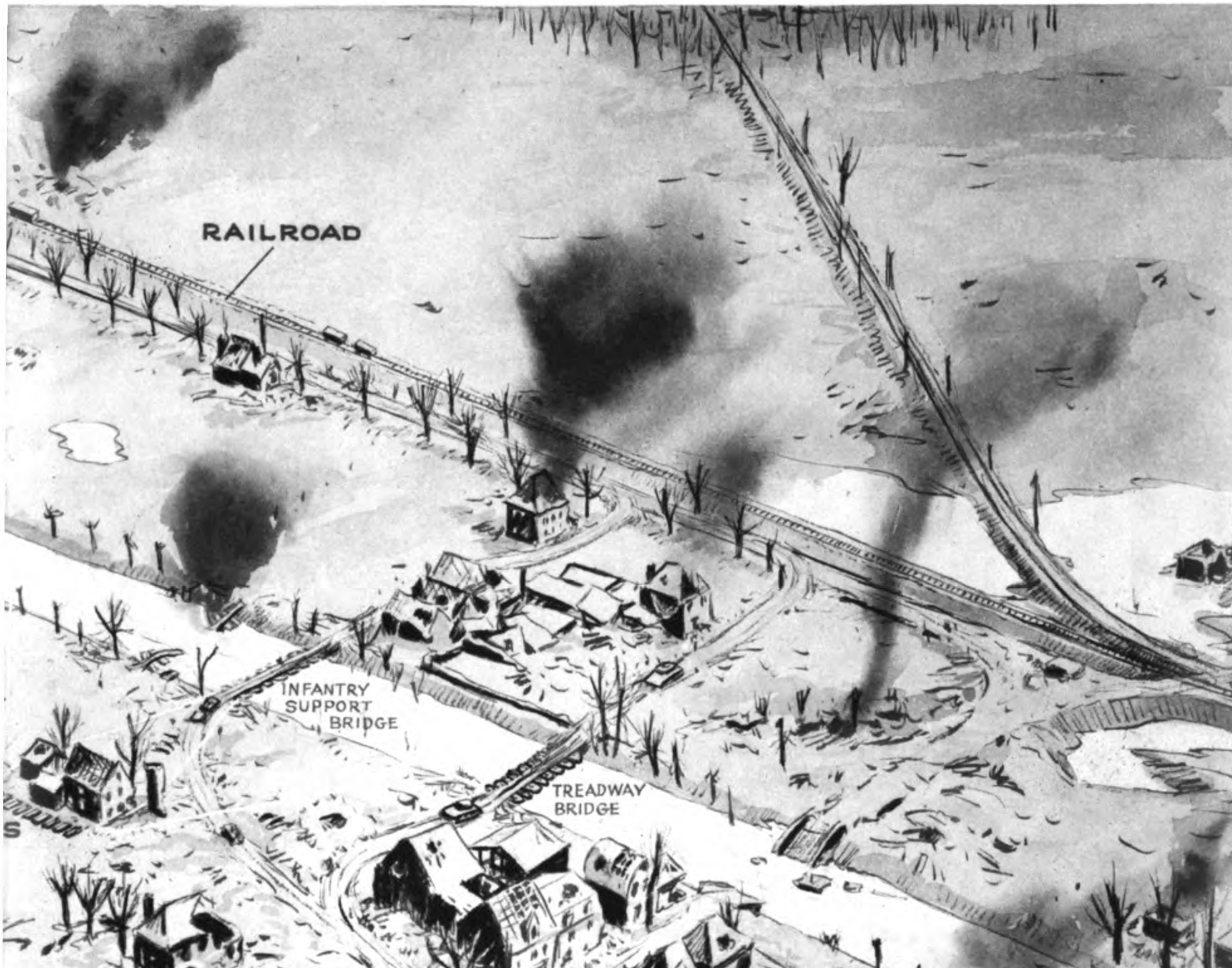
BY blowing a hole in the dams, the enemy flooded the Roer River valley and held up the crossing of the Roer. This aerial view was taken in the Linnich-Brachelen sector.

THE pile of metal submerged in the water of the Roer at Linnich was once a German steel-truss highway bridge. Our treadway bridge was put in at this site. The pillbox at the crossroads on the far bank in the center gave our assault units some trouble.

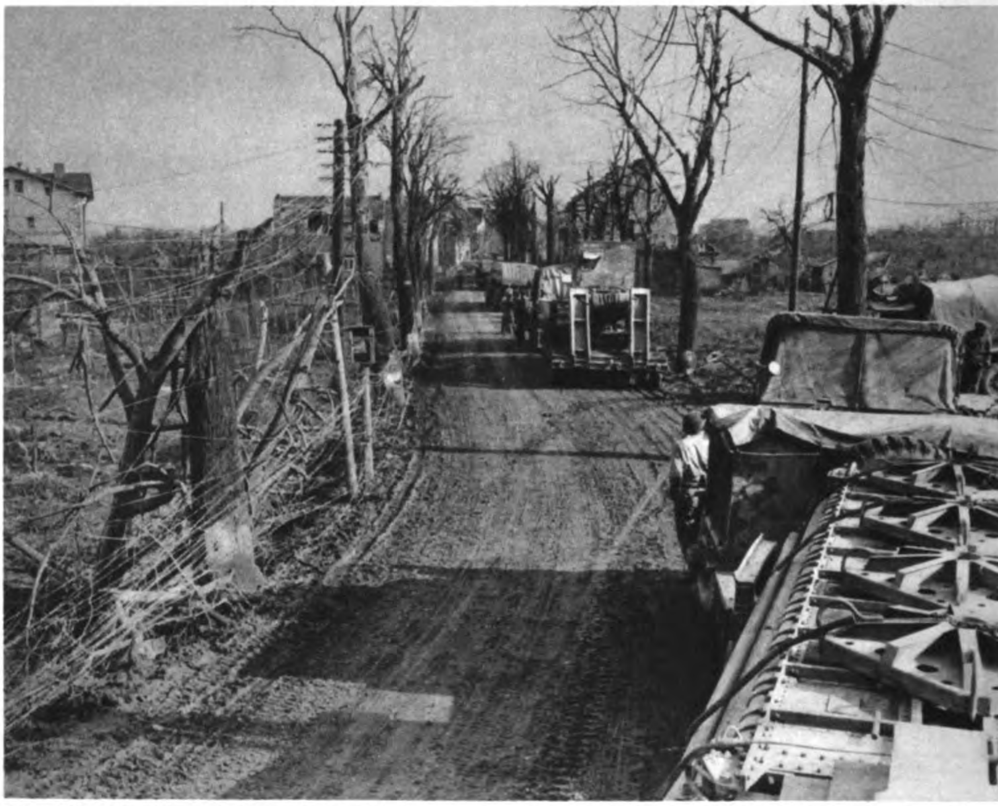




KÖRRENZIG
SPORTS PLAZA
INFANTRY FOOT-BRIDGE
18 BOATS
TAPED ROUTES
9 BO
8 BOATS



THE site of the Roer crossing, looking east to Linnich.



FINALLY, in the third week of February, the Roer crossing was due. Trucks and trailers, loaded with ponton bridge equipment, were lined up for the signal to go. All troops and equipment had to move on this single road from Lindern to Linnich.

BEFORE the assault boats were splashed into the Roer for the first crossing, the artillery backed by every available gun prepared the way for 45 minutes. The big guns, such as this 8-inch howitzer, roared incessantly.





AFTER the successful assault boat crossing, the bridge equipment was brought to the near bank, the pontons were inflated, the sections were assembled by the engineers.

THE infantry support bridge, to carry as much as a 2½-ton truck, was started as soon as the first footbridge was put in and stayed in.





TWO battalions crossed in assault boats, but the third used the finished footbridge.





WHEN these cars crossed the treadway bridge, it was still necessary to protect them with a smoke screen at left. It was too late to protect one assault boat.





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WHEN these cars crossed the treadway bridge, it was still necessary to protect them with a smoke screen at left. It was too late to protect one assault boat.





AFTER the river crossing, there were four days of hard fighting. A mine-removal squad rushed into Körrenzig, the first town on the other side to fall, still under constant enemy mortar and artillery fire.



PRISONERS began to march back at Körrenzig. There was no time for more than a glance at a former German ammunition cart.





BY that time, one pulverized town was like another, Baal (above), Granterath (below).





ON the fifth day, the break-through was achieved. The infantry loaded on tanks and reeled off 10 miles. But the follow-up units still walked.





EVERYTHING was moving, even on captured bicycles.

THE enemy's disorder was visible along the road at Waldniel.





KREFELD was another hollow shell, the biggest one en route to the Rhine.

AT Mörs, on the Rhine, Frederick I of Prussia was shocked.



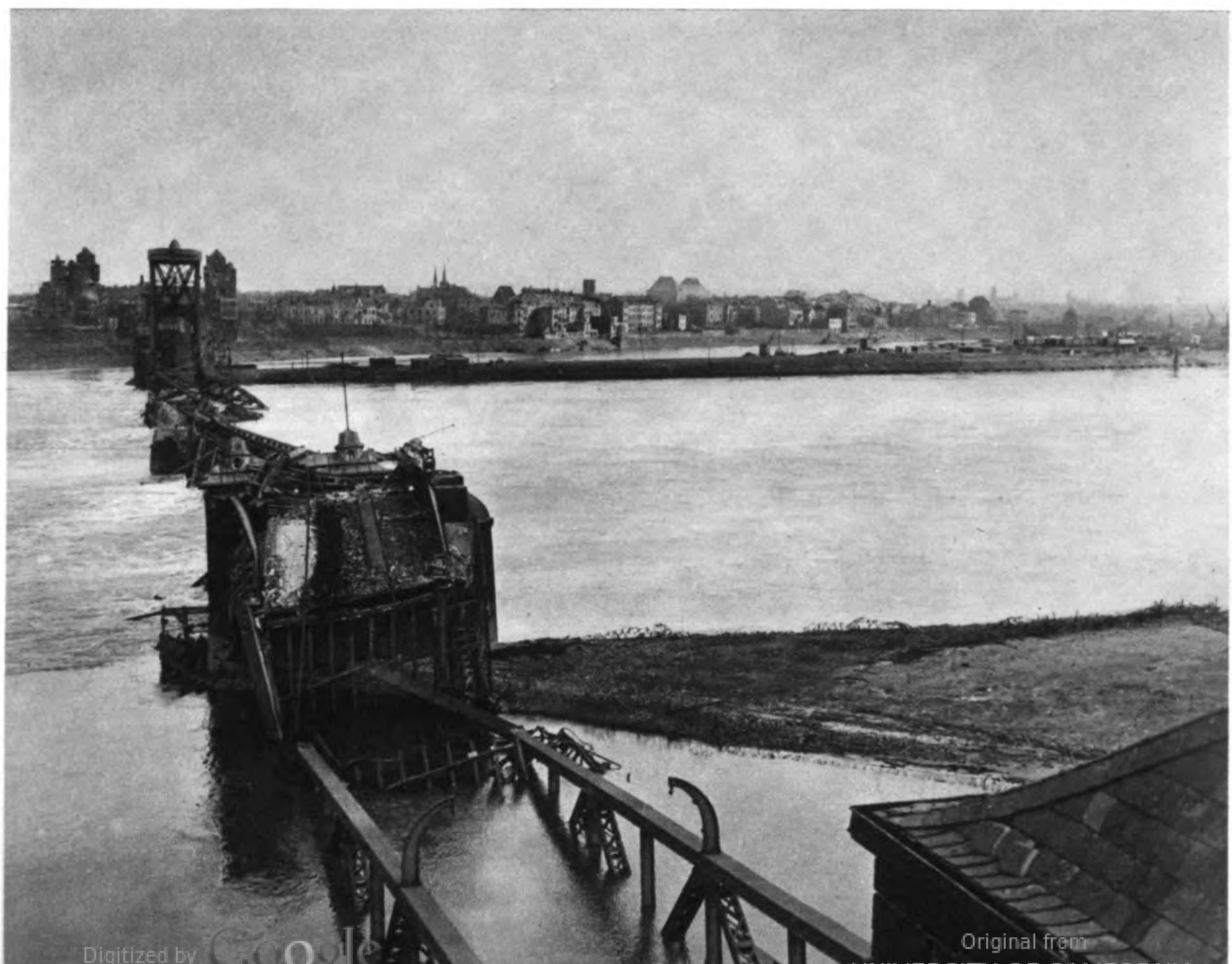


TWO-WAY traffic: prisoners to the rear, a 155 mm. gun of the field artillery to the front. No one told the German women and children to move, too, but they imitated their soldiers until they were stopped.





THE Rhine bridge from Homberg to Duisburg was a mass of twisted steel. The banks of the great river were quiet and the waters were safe enough for a baptism.





A MONTH'S halt was called at the Rhine, so the Red Cross girls brought out their doughnuts and coffee again.

Bistard at 1 a.m. on March 2 and the bridge was taken, still intact, three hours later. The worst opposition came from the weather. It was snowing.

Oedt itself was taken by the 333rd's 2nd Battalion late that afternoon. Organized enemy resistance was lacking but the occasion was notable for one reason. Oedt was the first town officially surrendered by the civilian officials.

"When I entered the town," the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Norman D. Carnes, related, "the first man I met was a hotelkeeper. I asked him where the burgermeister lived. He pointed out the burgermeister's house farther down the street and said that he felt sure the burgermeister would see me. To that I replied, 'I know damn well he will. If you don't have him here in five minutes, both of you will be sorry.' Needless to say, the hotelkeeper brought the burgermeister on the double. The burgermeister had an interpreter with him but the interpreter was more interested in finding out whether or not I would permit him to open his velvet factory the next day than in translating for the burgermeister."

Once the Niers Canal was left behind, the entire division, led by the 335th Infantry, struck out for Krefeld, about 8 miles away. It was one of the easiest and quickest phases of the advance, resembling in many ways Task Force Church's break-through three days earlier. The change of direction from north to east seemed to catch the enemy by surprise again and few organized enemy units were encountered on the way.

For the 335th, the 1st Battalion took the lead, the 3rd Battalion following. The 1st Battalion walked as far as Wegberg, entrucked and rode to Vorst, dismounted and walked to St. Tonis. The advance was almost completely uneventful as far as St. Tonis, which was two-thirds the way to Krefeld from the Niers Canal. Even at St. Tonis, however, the enemy was more interested in getting away than in holding us up. The 1st Battalion was fired upon by German artillery and anti-tank guns, all horse drawn, in front of St. Tonis. It brought up all of its available 57 mm. anti-tank weapons and machine guns and sent the enemy reeling. The 335th's 1st Battalion entered St. Tonis at about 11 a.m., March 2, and went through the town without difficulty. White flags were everywhere. At 6 p.m., the 3rd Battalion pulled into St. Tonis, just as the 1st Battalion was moving out again, this time for Krefeld. Some men will remember St. Tonis as quite a gay place. Company L, for example, took over a beer hall. While the proprietor served beer, an interesting Fräulein—one German word every GI was able to learn sooner or later—played the piano and sang.

But March 2 was one of those fast days. Miles were cheap for a change

and nobody had much time to pay attention to war's little ironies. Even obstacles which earlier in the campaign might have made us more cautious were almost immediately overcome, so anxious were we to hit the Rhine. At 6 p.m., Company C took the lead out of St. Tonis. Company C of the 771st Tank Battalion was backing the 1st Battalion. About 600 yards west of Krefeld, the advance was brought to a sudden halt. Small groups of enemy infantry were using reinforced basements of houses as pillboxes and at least three concrete air raid shelters were used as machine gun emplacements. Three anti-tank guns were sighted at three different angles. When the infantry began to receive fire from the pillboxes, the tanks were called forward. The anti-tank gunners permitted the tanks to move behind their positions, then opened fire on the rear of the tank column. Company C's tanks were split in two by the maneuver, four of its tanks and one jeep were knocked out, two enemy anti-tank guns were smashed, and the whole attack was held up.

But not for long. At about midnight, the infantry and tanks started out again, this time Company B's infantry in the lead and Company A's tanks in support. The column drove right into the northern sector of Krefeld without incident. Krefeld was quiet. The Nazis were not even able to defend an industrial center with a normal population of 160,000. In fact, the city fell so quickly that the municipal electric and water systems were still working. For the first time in Germany, 84th men saw running water. Doughboys had to climb telephone poles to cut communication wires with the rest of Germany. Krefeld also produced the highest ranking prisoner to fall into our hands in 14 weeks. As Company C was advancing, a German staff car came down the road. The company commander, Lt. William B. Wood, ordered his men to open fire. The car stopped abruptly. Colonel von Bruske stepped out, his hands raised, shaking. The colonel explained that he was only a rear echelon officer but that he was ordered to the front to lead a battle group of the 176th Division. The 335th's 3rd Battalion followed the 1st Battalion into Krefeld and the 84th's half of the city was cleared by 5 a.m., March 3. The 102nd Infantry Division went into its half of Krefeld later that day but was not able to clear its area until the next day, March 4.

While the 335th was moving toward Krefeld on March 2, the 333rd also was moving but its advance was farther north to protect Krefeld's left flank. The 333rd's 3rd Battalion went into the town of Unterweiden, the 2nd Battalion to Stiegerheide, by nightfall. Outside Unterweiden, the 3rd Bat-

talion spotted five bicycles followed by 15 enemy infantrymen. The whole group was taken in hand. One of the prisoners, a communications sergeant, even volunteered the best route into the town. About ten paratroopers were found in Unterweiden but they were so outnumbered that they gave up without a fight.

The next day, March 3, the 333rd's 1st Battalion, accompanied by the 771st's Company B, were ordered to take a roundabout route to Krefeld which enabled them to clear a few more important towns. From Oedt, this column went to Kempen, about 3 miles northeast. One of the strangest scenes in the campaign was witnessed in Kempen. As the column entered the town from the south, a few bursts of burp gun fire greeted the leading vehicles. The infantry and tanks immediately opened up. The column roared through the streets to the square in the heart of the town. In a church on that square, services were in progress. As the column passed by, everyone in the church came out, knelt on the steps of the church, and waved at our men with everything from white handkerchiefs to white sheets. This column continued eastward through Hüls, then turned southeast through Bruckerhofe and Inrath into Krefeld. In effect, the whole Krefeld area, for about 4 miles around, was paid a short visit. The general atmosphere was submissive and, on the part of many civilians, even cooperative. From Krefeld on, the army of white banners became a common sight.

Why Generals Get That Way

On March 2, when Krefeld became the next objective, the 84th was almost in sight of its original goal. The Rhine at Uerdingen was only about 3 miles from Krefeld. But that afternoon, a telephone call from higher headquarters forced us to make a lightning change in plan. It was the cause of the 84th's greatest disappointment in the entire battle of Germany.

On March 2, the 84th was in a position to capture the first bridge across the Rhine. The Uerdingen bridge was still intact. In fact, the enemy was still using it. The staff had drawn up all the necessary plans and instructions for the plunge to the river and the establishment of a firm bridgehead on the other side. About 2500 yards east of the Rhine was a first-rate road. That was the objective. Even if the Uerdingen bridge was blown after the crossing, we were in a position to build another bridge because we held the

high ground on the western bank. Lt. Col. Channon, G-4, had arranged for planes to drop food and ammunition, if that proved necessary. The entire mission was approved by higher headquarters. A field order was issued. A special task force was organized, the emphasis on speed and power. It included an infantry regiment, the 334th, a whole tank battalion, the 771st, and a tank destroyer company. The 334th had been given a full day's rest at Boisheim.

This drive was set for 2 p.m. All the men knew that they were starting off on an historic mission—the first bridgehead across the Rhine—and their hearts were set on it. General Bolling was there to wave them off. The sergeant in the lead tank handed him a thin cigar, saying: "Here, General, smoke this. Give me one across the Rhine." An MP detachment had cleared the road as far as Krefeld. The task force moved out. The tanks worked up to 25 miles an hour.

A few minutes later, the call came through. It was relayed to General Bolling by the chief of staff, Colonel Truman. Higher headquarters had decided to give the zone of the Uerdingen Bridge to the XIX Corps and to send the 84th to the zone farther north. The new order put us at the Rhine in the vicinity of Homberg. Instead of 3 more miles, we had about 11 more miles to go. Why this change was made is still obscure. General Bolling asked for reconsideration. The order was repeated. Homberg was not even on General Bolling's map at that moment.

It was too late to stop the Rhine-bound task force. One of the hardest and most dangerous maneuvers in the art of war was obligatory. It was necessary to reroute a huge column in motion. At the same time, it was necessary to make an immediate and equally far-reaching change in the work of the other two columns. Originally, the 335th had to take half of Krefeld, the 333rd had to protect the left flank of Krefeld, and the 334th had to drive through to the Uerdingen Bridge. Now, all three columns had to do something else. General Bolling had to call all three regimental commanders on a moment's notice, direct them to change their course, and give them altogether new missions about 10 miles away in a zone which they had never even considered.

It was an intense, heartbreaking moment. General Bolling put through the calls. He gave the orders. The regimental commanders were barely able to believe their ears.

The switch was made. The Uerdingen Bridge was swiftly forgotten. New maps were hunted up frantically. All eyes turned north, to Homberg.

North Again

In our new sector, two bridges spanned the Rhine. The one farther north, the Baerl Railroad Bridge or Knippbrucke, was built for rail traffic and adapted for vehicle traffic. It was a five-span bridge and the Rhine at this point was approximately 1000 yards wide. The other, the Admiral Scheer Bridge, connected the cities of Duisburg and Homberg. It was a highway bridge, 2050 feet long, 53 feet wide, with a road width of 38 feet and a water gap of 1600 feet. This type was known as a steel candelabra truss type bridge.

On March 2, while the 335th was moving on Krefeld, the 334th took charge of the new mission to Homberg. Its objective was the Admiral Scheer Bridge. In order to get there as quickly as possible, this column was ordered to bypass Krefeld and to strike out to the north from St. Tonis. Once its job in Krefeld was finished, the 335th could move up from behind, pass through the rear of the 334th, and take a longer route on the left flank to the Baerl Railroad Bridge. The two bridges were about 3 miles apart. The 333rd was sent into Krefeld.

It is interesting to note that the 334th had to fight its way out of St. Tonis, although the 335th had already passed through it. This was typical of the action from the Roer to the Rhine. The leading elements would advance along the main routes and reconnaissance elements would cover the flanks on the secondary routes. Nevertheless, pockets of enemy troops were often met by the units that followed up in the same general direction and no march was entirely uneventful. In this case, the 334th arrived in St. Tonis in the late afternoon, March 2. This column was spearheaded by the 334th's 1st Battalion, and the 771st's Company C. Northeast of St. Tonis, in the little village of Ortsmannsheide, the tanks ran into a pocket of enemy self-propelled guns and anti-tank weapons. A fierce fire fight held up the advance for four hours and the column had to reorganize in St. Tonis before it was safe to start out again. This time Company A's tanks took the lead. Company C's infantry walked ahead of the tanks, Company A's beside them, and Company B behind them.

"That night we had about the wildest night march you can imagine," said Captain B. C. Mills, commander of the 771st's Company C. Once more, an advance that was stalled in the daylight was not held up for more daylight but was started off again at night on a round-the-clock basis. The success

seemed to be coming from a distance not more than 100 yards away and slightly off the road to the right. "We just sweated that out for a little while —and I mean sweated," one 2nd Battalion man said. To everyone's intense relief, a tank silhouette was picked up. It was a Sherman. In a few more minutes the situation was cleared up. The tanks were our own 771st's Company A, coming up with the 334th's 3rd Battalion.

Actually, both the 335th and the 334th were exactly where they were supposed to be but, in the dark and with so much evidence of enemy preparations to resist, nothing was certain. The routes of both columns, one from Klied, the other from Niep, had to converge at the road junction in Bettenkamp. For a short stretch of about 1000 yards, both columns had to go up the same road toward Mörs. The 334th, however, had to turn off south of Mörs to the east, passing through Mörs-Vinn to the Admiral Scheer Bridge in Homberg, while the 335th continued northward into Mörs itself.

And so the 334th's column arrived at the Bettenkamp road junction first and passed through, while the 335th waited. Otherwise, in the dark, it would have been impossible to separate the two. By the exhaust of the tanks, the 335th was able to judge when the 334th had turned off the road and then the 335th's 2nd Battalion moved out again toward Mörs. Since the wood, in which the enemy was supposed to be dug in, was only a few yards from the road which the 334th had just passed through, the original plan of investigating it was given up in favor of speed.

This was the setting for the "wild shooting party." When the 335th's 2nd Battalion started down the road from Bettenkamp to Mörs, it discovered that its two prisoners had been right. Out of the woods on the left of the road came a blast of fire, anti-tank guns, panzerfausts, and machine guns. The 2nd Battalion hit the ground. A few minutes later, a similar blast came from the opposite direction. The enemy's fire was going over the head of the 335th's column and landing in and near the 334th's column. The latter was shooting back. In fact, the 334th was getting most of the enemy's fire. With the enemy on the left, the 334th on the right, and the 335th in between, it was small wonder that "everyone was firing in all directions at once." Two engineer trucks near the 335th's Company E were hit. They were carrying explosives and proceeded to blow up like a string of gigantic firecrackers. Meanwhile, the 335th's E and F Companies began to push into the woods, and prisoners, tired of playing on the losing team, were coming out. For some whimsical reason, the 335th's 2nd Battalion, which was caught in between, did not lose a single vehicle.

In any case, on the night of March 3-4, the cities of Mörs and Homberg

were practically all that stood between us and the Rhine in our zone. It was also clear that the enemy's efforts to build up a crust of resistance on the west bank of the Rhine were good but not good enough.

The 84th's staff was able to breathe freely again. The last 24 hours had been gruesome. In order to obey the order to go to Homberg instead of the Uerdingen Bridge, one of the "forbidden" maneuvers in combat—"forbidden" in general staff schools—was necessary. No fewer than three major columns had to be crossed at the same time. The 335th had to cross the 334th at the Bettenkamp road junction. The 333rd had to cross the 335th to get into Krefeld. The traffic problem was stupendous. Every member of the staff, including the chaplain, adjutant general, inspector general, and finance officer, was sent out to road junctions to keep the columns straight that night. The books said that it was impossible. Considering the circumstances, not only was it possible but it was achieved with amazingly little confusion.

The Rhine at Last

The last day of real combat in our zone west of the Rhine was March 4 or D-plus-9. That morning the enemy was holding only a 4-mile bridgehead, but the very momentum of our advance tended to throw us into sharp conflict against his relatively large forces that were jammed into the bridgehead, trying to escape over the bridges to the east bank. To follow the final drive, it will simplify matters to start with the unit that succeeded in reaching the Rhine first.

At daylight, March 4, the 335th's 2nd Battalion, which had sweated it out at the Bettenkamp road junction during the night, moved out toward Mörs. It went through the southern part of the town without encountering more than scattered snipers who surrendered quite readily. A good deal of mortar fire, however, hit the town from the north. The first solid resistance was met at Meerbeck, a half mile east of Mörs, about noon. From Meerbeck, the Baerl Railroad Bridge, its objective, was visible. A steady stream of traffic, mainly horse-drawn artillery, trucks, and many foot troops, was crossing over. Our artillery was called to put a stop to that. Time fire exploded into great flame-red flower-clusters of steel above the bridge, darting from the west bank to the east bank and back again. Several vehicles were knocked out and only foot troops tried to get across. But still the enemy did not blow the bridge.

Along the river were three railroad embankments. All of them were

heavily defended and anti-tank guns covered all the possible approaches. At about 1 p.m., Company E loaded on tanks and tried to charge up to the bridge but the anti-tank guns opened up and the tanks had to pull back. About a dozen men of Company E, however, did reach the Rhine at 1:25 p.m., the first in the division to do so. Then one platoon of Company E tried to cross an open field between the first and second embankments but the enemy's fire was still too strong and this effort also failed.

It was necessary to wait until dark to pass Companies F and G through Company E and move them all to the river bank. The battalion reached the Rhine with all three companies on line. Soon after, at 8 p.m., the bridge was finally blown. It was still used by enemy foot troops until about 1 a.m., March 5, however, when a second explosion was heard. Company E came to the bridge area two hours later and confirmed that the bridge had crashed into the Rhine.

The 335th's 3rd Battalion came to the Rhine with somewhat more difficulty. At 9:30 p.m., March 4, it was ordered out of Meerbeck to seize a road junction at Lohmannsheide about a mile northwest of the bridge, which the enemy was using to withdraw from the north. As a result, although the Germans were bent on retreat across the river rather than resistance on the west bank, they held that area in much greater strength than elsewhere. At least 100 vehicles, including tanks, half-tracks, troop carriers, and trucks, moved through the road junction that night.

Company L was leading. About 800 yards from the objective, Captain Oreste V. Valsangiacomo stopped the company to check his maps. He went into a house along the road, fortunately through the back door, and found six German officers sitting around a table in the next room. It was an enemy CP. He left quietly, realized that the company had walked into the German lines, but decided to continue on to the road junction, hoping to slip through before the ruse was discovered. He was almost successful too. Soon, however, the Germans opened up with machine guns and small arms, the company was cut in two, and he managed to hit the road junction with 30 men. There, in the midst of the biggest enemy concentration in the entire area, they dug in for the night to wait for reinforcements. Company I and Company K came up later and also dug in near the road junction.

Since the bridge was blown that night and the 335th's 2nd Battalion was already holding a part of the river bank, the 3rd Battalion was sent to clean out Baerl the next morning, March 5. It was empty. Captain Valsangiacomo found the rest of his company. Later in the day, the 3rd Battalion went into position along the Rhine.

As for the 334th Infantry, after the wild shooting party, the 3rd Battalion moved out on the morning of March 4 and headed for Homberg, arriving at about 7 p.m. Company I received some fire from an enemy tank at an underpass at the edge of the town, but the tank pulled out and the company cleared out the right half of the town without resistance. Company K caught a platoon of German troops by surprise; some were running around Homberg without any weapons. Company I went into position along the Rhine at about 3 a.m. the next morning, March 5, Company K after daylight. The 334th's 2nd Battalion was held up south of Mörs on March 4 by two 88's but managed to bypass them after dark and went on to the Rhine by about 5 a.m., March 5.

In the sober language of official reports, the 84th's drive from the Roer to the Rhine was told as follows:

"In ten days, February 23-March 4, 1945, the 84th Infantry Division advanced approximately 45 miles from Linnich on the Roer to Homberg on the Rhine.

"The 84th's break-through from Metzerath to Waldniel on February 27 was the first of its kind in the Battle of Germany.

"The 84th led the Ninth U. S. Army to the Rhine, its flanks almost always exposed because the flank divisions could not maintain the same pace.

"There were six distinct phases in the drive:

(1) February 23—the Roer crossing
(2) February 23-26—the first crust of resistance, Linnich to Matzerath
(3) February 27—first break-through, Matzerath to Waldniel
(4) February 28-March 1—second crust of resistance, Waldniel to Süchteln
(5) March 2-4—second break-through, Süchteln to Mörs
(6) March 4-5—last phase, Mörs and Homberg

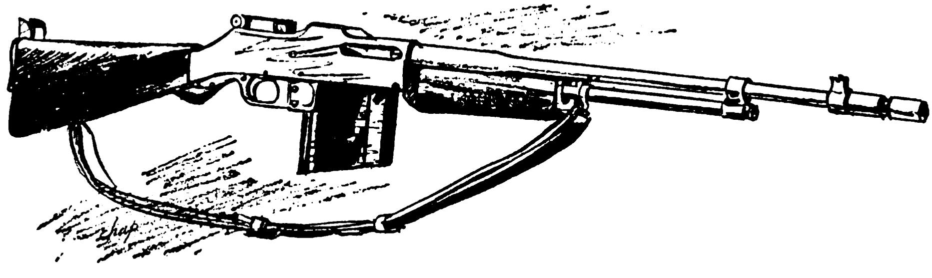
"The total number of prisoners taken, February 23-March 5, was 5445.

"Enemy equipment destroyed, captured or damaged for the operation included 40 FA guns, 21 88 mm. AA/AT guns, 21 75 mm. AT guns, 18 assault guns and tanks, 159 motor vehicles, 6 searchlights, 13 supply dumps, 7 destroyed and 2 probably destroyed enemy aircraft.

"The 84th Infantry Division was one of the very few divisions which fought all the way from the Roer to the Rhine without losing its momentum for a single day."

Part Four

TO THE ELBE



CHAPTER XII

Across the Rhine

WE SAT on the Rhine for almost a month. It was the first real relief for the division in 15 weeks. We were holding a sector of the river front but it was relatively quiet. The Germans on the other side made themselves as scarce as possible. Approximately 30 per cent of the two regiments on the river remained in prepared positions all the time but a system of rotation gave everyone a rest.

What does a battle-weary soldier do when he gets a chance to take it easy?

He washes. He scrubs himself, his clothes, his equipment. In combat, dirt is almost as necessary as danger. An outfit that is in the line under fire for three, four days, maybe a week, has other things to think about than a change of underwear. To wash, to smell of soap, is almost a symbol of peace. On the Rhine, the war was by no means over but, for a little while, the fighting was. That peace was enough for the moment. A filthy hero can go a long way from war to peace on a cake of soap.

He talks. Not that all soldiers like to speak about their experiences at the front but most do. It is always remarkable how much a man who has been scared to death can remember. It is even more remarkable how honest, absolutely honest, he can be. In a month or a year, he may unconsciously drop out of the story all the unpleasant or embarrassing details. But in the first 48 hours, just back from the line, he has an obsession to tell the truth, every terrible bit of it. He has to get it out of his system, the good and the bad, as if he had a crime on his conscience. He is not worried about being a hero. He figures he did enough just to be in it and come back.

He writes letters. He gets his mail which has piled up for a week or more. Just before his outfit jumped off, he probably wrote a letter which began: "Dearest darling: You will not hear from me for a few days because I will be too busy." For many men, the worst part about going into combat is the

fact that the mail clerk cannot go along. Men wonder what they will miss in their letters if they never come back to collect them. When they do come back, the mail clerk finally drags out the bags of letters and packages, calls off the names one by one, tosses out the priceless things. They hurry away to open them alone and for a few minutes the army, rank, regulations do not exist. Or they have to tear through them on the spot with the comfortable feeling that there will be plenty of time to read them a dozen times later.

There were passes to Paris, Heerlen, and the Riviera for the lucky ones. The Reinforcement Center handled the men who went out on passes as well as the new men who came into the division. There were 15 motion picture units in barns, stores, and courthouses. There were U.S.O. shows, including Lily Pons, division band shows, Red Cross girls, and doughnuts. There was the first ice cream in the E.T.O. Chaplain Marvin J. Goldfine held the first Jewish services in Germany in seven years in Krefeld. There were houses to live in, not foxholes, not cellars, huts, or tents, but real honest-to-goodness houses, houses with running water, carpets, chairs, beds, probably a radio and a piano. One of the *Railsplitters'* reporters wrote enthusiastically: "Not more than 300 yards from the enemy, doughs of the 84th, who slogged through the mud of Prummern and Geilenkirchen, who watched their feet swell in frozen foxholes of the Ardennes, are living and fighting from tiled bathrooms, deep-cushioned easy chairs, and six-inch box spring beds covered with lace spreads." But, since the army was still the army, there was still a training program.

There were also patrols. When there was nothing else, there were always patrols. The 309th Engineer (C) Battalion inspected the bridges in our sector to see if they could be used for a crossing. Patrols went across the river almost every night. Usually they were uneventful but some of them were more dangerous and costly.

One patrol, whose experiences were typical, was sent out on the night of March 19-20. Led by Lt. Billy B. Sloan, 333rd Infantry, it was given the mission of reconnoitering a tip of land between two canals that ran into Duisburg. With four men, Lt. Sloan crossed the Rhine in a rubber assault boat. They went as far as the lower canal before they were challenged by a German sentry. When they could not give the password, they were fired on. The boat was upset as they tried to abandon it and all their weapons were lost. Small arms fire was trained on them as they swam for shore. Lt. Sloan cried "Help!" and groaned. He was never seen again. One man was able to catch the drifting boat and pick up the other three. They paddled with

their hands along the upper bank of the canal in the face of heavier and heavier small arms fire.

Painfully, they managed to steer themselves into the river. From behind a barge, a rowboat full of Germans came at them. For some reason, the Germans seemed to ignore them, possibly because they were obscured by the darkness. Drifting downstream, they decided to land on the east bank for a rest. A few minutes later, they were able to return to the west bank and were picked up by an outpost of the 334th's Anti-Tank Platoon. The patrol brought back vital information. The channel was full of floating flares that were set off when struck by any object. The flares were held in place by wires from the east bank of the river. The canal was free of blocks.

Such was life on the Rhine. It was only an interlude because in the back of everyone's mind was the thought that it could come to an end at any moment, that only one more surge—to Berlin—was necessary, but it was a kind, welcome interlude, a reminder that war had more in it than danger and death.

The Big Picture Once Again

For the first time in four months, the 84th was not directly involved in a major operation in the battle of Germany. This was the Rhine crossing. Actually, after the Roer crossing the Rhine crossing was an anticlimax. By March 1945, the German Army was so short of manpower in the west and so mortally wounded in the east that the task of defending the long stretch from Nijmegen to Basel, about 400 miles of front, was impossible. The Allied concentration of force for the last phase was crushing.

It is hard to see how the Germans could have held out at the Rhine in any case, but a stroke of fate at just the right moment stripped the German high command of all freedom of choice. On March 7, the 9th Armored Division came to the railroad bridge at Remagen, midway between Cologne and Coblenz, found it only slightly damaged by demolitions, the enemy consisting only of light construction engineer and anti-aircraft units, and drove over to establish the first bridgehead across the Rhine. The next two weeks were a race to the bridgehead, on the part of the Americans to enlarge it, on the enemy's part to drive our forces out or to contain them. Despite the very heavy German reinforcements, the bridgehead was held and even enlarged. The importance of the Remagen bridgehead, however, was not

merely local. It ate up all the available reserves in the west, preventing the German command from building up a stronger force on the east bank of the Rhine. Thereafter, German defense was almost uncontrollably a matter of improvisation.

On March 24, the turn of the Ninth Army came. At Wesel, about 15 miles north of Homberg, the XVI Corps crossed the Rhine (Map 15). The 84th made a minor contribution to the crossing. From March 18 on, our sector of the river was smoked every day, so that the element of surprise was possible when the crossing was finally made in another sector.

While we were waiting for the XIII Corps, to which we belonged, to follow the XVI Corps across the Rhine, 84th men were involved in an incident in Duisburg and Ruhrort, across the Rhine, which has a special interest as an early case history of the German breakdown. On March 27, Ninth Army loudspeakers on the west bank of the Rhine called out to the people in Duisburg to surrender. That started something.

The following afternoon, March 28, a mortar observer from the 334th's Company H near our side of the Admiral Scheer Bridge noticed a white flag on a house on the German side. Ten minutes later, he saw a dozen white flags on both sides of the bridge. Two men in uniform brought a white flag out of the bridge tower and planted it in the ground at the base of the tower. Civilians began to pour out of houses. An officer of the 334th's Company F was called to investigate.

Two patrols were organized. One headed for the men in uniform. These were found to be civilian policemen. Ten of them were left in Duisburg. They reported that all German troops had pulled out that morning, apparently headed north. The patrol was conducted with some ceremony through Ruhrort, a suburb of Duisburg. There was no food, no water, and few medical supplies in the town. Hundreds of civilians milled around them, some so overjoyed that the soldiers were frequently embraced. One man, who said he had the authority, wanted to turn the place over to the Americans. When the patrol returned to the boat, they found that it was leaking. A policeman found another and rowed them back.

Meanwhile, the second patrol had crossed the Rhine to the north. They demanded to see the burgermeister, the police chief, and the priest. These men came forward and were sent to Military Government officials on our side. Another crowd led the patrol through a mine field, around the street barricades, and into Duisburg. Everyone was talking at once, mainly begging the Americans to stop the bombings. A woman ran up and reported

some soldiers in another part of the city. Two men were sent to get the soldiers who surrendered willingly. They also found eight Volkssturm men and two Belgians who had been fighting in the German army. In one air raid shelter, packed with 3000 people, 30 of them wounded, a medic set up an aid station.

On a second trip across the river that day, the patrol met an advance unit of the 79th Infantry Division which was coming down from the north to occupy Duisburg.

The next day, March 29, our own role in the drive across the Rhine was clarified. After crossing at Wesel, we were going to follow the 5th Armored Division as far as the Dortmund-Ems Canal, roughly a distance of 35 miles. In this original plan, Munster was the first important objective of the 84th, but it should be remembered that the front moved much too fast for plans and Munster was the first of many changes. For this operation, the division operated as three combat teams, the 333rd under Colonel Lloyd H. Gomes, the 334th under Colonel Charles E. Hoy, and the 335th under Colonel Hugh C. Parker.

It is interesting to compare the conceptions of the three main drives in northern Germany, the Siegfried Line, the Roer-Rhine, and the Rhine-Elbe. In the Siegfried Line, the objective was to push through a relatively narrow space, approximately 10 miles in depth, but one so heavily fortified that every 100 yards, certainly every 1000 yards, was a distinct achievement. The possibilities of surprise were limited. The time element was not so important. To demolish this formidable system of interlocking defenses at a minimum cost was the main thing. In the Roer-Rhine drive, both the space and time elements were loosened up. The distance was 25 miles, the time was approximately ten days. But in the Rhine-Elbe drive, all the stops were out. The limit was Berlin or the Red Army. The distance between the two rivers was 250 miles, 25 times as much as the Siegfried Line, 10 times as much as the Roer-Rhine. Yet, as the space increased, the time had to contract. In other words, we had to cover a lot of ground in a hurry.

Since it was difficult to plan for an eventuality 150 miles away, the type of planning was long range. In our case, the main problem was to foresee any materiel shortages that might slow us down or stop us altogether before the final goal was reached. The entire division was motorized. The 84th started across the Rhine with 264 2½-ton trucks from six Ninth Army truck companies, though they were gradually taken away from us en route and we had to find other means to stay on wheels. When the move began, all units

carried five days' rations, 150 per cent basic load of light artillery ammunition, 133 per cent basic load of medium artillery ammunition, and 200 per cent basic load of infantry ammunition. The theory was that a drive was never slowed down because it had "too much," only when it did not have enough.

Since the 84th was the first infantry division behind the 5th Armored, at least in the first stage of the campaign, it had to stay as close to the armor as possible. The armor could get through by avoiding heavy resistance. We could get through by meeting heavy resistance but not by trying to comb the whole area. Other divisions behind us had to clean out pockets of resistance. The 84th was given, therefore, a dual role—to move up right behind the armor and to fight off the first signs of real resistance.

The terrain from the Rhine to the Elbe was, on the whole, no obstacle to a fast drive. East of the Rhine are three principal rivers, the Weser, Leine, and Elbe. The Weser and the Leine, only about 30 miles apart, were convenient midway points in the campaign as a whole. Of the two, only the Weser was considered a possible obstacle of any seriousness. The area is generally a lowland of undulating plains with two ridges or high ground systems passing through it. They are the Teutoburger Wald between Munster and Bielefeld, which gave us no trouble, and the Weser Gebirge, near the Weser River, which did give us some trouble (Map 13). It is part of the great plain of northern Europe, mainly less than 300 feet in elevation and almost all under 600 feet. Marshes, bogs, and lakes, smooth-sided valleys, and belts of rounded hills somewhat help to break the monotony of the landscape.

The road net, one of the most vital factors in a motorized drive, was unusually helpful. An autobahn, thoughtfully built by the Hitler regime, passed through Herford, Hannover, Braunschweig, and Magdeburg to Berlin. At least two other first-class roads, roughly paralleling the autobahn, could be used as alternate routes. Three primary north-south highways, one through Hannover, one through Braunschweig, and the third through Magdeburg, were also available. The major road system is supported by numerous secondary roads which, however, become less numerous toward the north.

Once across the Rhine, we could look forward to a relatively clear course as far as the Elbe, which resembled the Rhine in many respects as a barrier to military movement. The Elbe was a natural stopping point, if only to get our second wind, even if we might otherwise have gone on to Berlin.

The First 100 Miles

For the 84th, the Rhine crossing was just a bumpy ride. Our job was not to make the bridgehead but to exploit it and the fighting for the crossing, such as it was, had been done by others. Compared to the Roer crossing, the Rhine crossing was a walkover. The XVI Corps had forced its way over the Rhine at Wesel a week before, then turned south to take part in the battle of the Ruhr pocket. On April 1, the XIII Corps started to cross the Rhine at Wesel and, by heading east, it took over the pursuit to the Elbe. For the XIII Corps, the 5th Armored led off, the 84th right behind, the 102nd behind us. With this tremendous concentration of force ahead of us, the way to the east was clear for more than 50 miles by the time we had joined the chase.

Yet, though we did not have to fight as soon as we got on the other side, Wesel and all the towns for an hour's ride to the east brought the war back to us with some shock. They were pummeled into rubble. Gone were the tiled bathrooms, easy chairs, spring beds of the west bank. Gone were washing, letter writing, talk. To see those ruins on the east bank was like going back to the Siegfried Line for a few hours.

The 335th's 1st Battalion began to cross the Rhine at 2:15 p.m. on April 1. That night, the 335th's entire combat team went as far as Lembeck, about 15 miles from the Rhine. The other two combat teams were moving up behind. The next day, April 2, the 335th went as far as Appelhulsen, about 40 miles from the Rhine, while the other two pulled up near Lembeck.

In those first two days, the spotlight was on the 5th Armored, out ahead of us. By April 2, it had bypassed Munster and had progressed as far as Halle, about 85 miles from the Rhine. A pocket of resistance held out in Munster that night but it was reduced by the 17th Airborne Division the next day. As a result, the original intention of the 84th to take Munster was canceled out by the tremendous momentum of the drive. The 335th moved out of Appelhulsen at 10:30 a.m., April 3, crossed the Dortmund-Ems Canal at Senden, and passed by Munster to the south, using secondary roads in order to steer clear of the snipers left in Munster who might have held us up.

The first sign of opposition was a road block encountered by the 333rd's column at 9 p.m., April 3, at the town of Sendenhorst, about 55 miles from the Rhine. At midnight, the 333rd's 1st Battalion, in the lead, met some light resistance in Warendorf, about 10 miles northeast. Both the 333rd and the

335th drove through the night of April 3-4. It was almost like a race between the two columns, the 333rd on the right, the 335th on the left. At 3:15 a.m., April 4, the 335th's 1st Battalion entered Telgte, about 60 miles from the Rhine. About 30 German soldiers surrendered painlessly. By dawn, April 4, the 333rd had shot ahead as far as the outskirts of Bielefeld, which put it approximately 30 miles ahead of any other unit. While the 333rd was held up at Bielefeld, the 335th was able to catch up with it (Map 16, following page 228).

On the morning of April 4, the 333rd neared Bielefeld, about 90 miles from the Rhine, just before daybreak. The column was still in night formation, tanks between trucks. Just as the tanks of Company B, 771st Tank Battalion, were about to take the lead, trouble broke out at Brackwede, about a mile short of Bielefeld. The Germans had a 20 mm. gun and about 15 panzerfaust* men alongside the road. The 20 mm. opened up first and wounded one man. The panzerfausts joined in. Two Company A platoons, riding the tanks, dismounted. The tanks hurried to the head of the column. At this, the Germans decided to pull back. At about 7:30 a.m., the column started out again. Five minutes later, at a railroad underpass outside of Brackwede, a defended road block was encountered. It was the usual log block, covered by machine gun fire to the rear and sniper fire to the flanks. The tanks opened up, the infantry jumped down and searched the area, the Germans pulled out again. The engineers came up and broke through the block. By 9:45 a.m., the column was moving for the third time.

Within ten minutes, a real fight, the first, broke out. In effect, every time the Germans had pulled back, they had been joined by others so that now their numbers and fire power were considerable. The enlarged force decided to fight it out at another road block nearer to, but still outside of, Bielefeld. Rifle, panzerfaust, and automatic weapons fire was received from the vicinity of the block and from a hill southeast of the road. Company A's two platoons dismounted again, formed at the side of the road, and fought up to the block. Company C was brought up and sent into the hills on both sides of the roads to clean out the woods. Two enemy 88's were knocked out by our tank destroyers before they could fire a round. The fire lasted only about 20 minutes, but about three hours were spent mopping up the area. One enemy machine gun crew was overlooked, played dead until the column began to move, woke up and strafed the center of the column. A

** The panzerfaust was a German anti-tank weapon which was small and light enough to be operated by a single man and simple enough to be taught quickly to the newly organized Volkssturm, which was composed of civilians.*

few men were hit but soon those machine gunners did not have to play at being dead.

By 3 p.m., the head of the column was entering Bielefeld. Another road block, defended by riflemen, one machine gun, and one panzerfaust, was encountered in the center of town. The leading tank approached within 50 yards of the block before the panzerfaust opened up. The tank backed around a corner unhit. There were two ways to get at the block. The main road made an L turn straight into the block. A side road curved around and came out on the main road just in front of the block. For the fourth time, Company A's two platoons dismounted. One went up the main road, the other the side road. One tank supported each platoon. When our mortars opened up on the block, the enemy machine gun withdrew. The tank on the left flank, on the side road, let go with its 76.

When the engineers came up, they found that the tank's 76 had almost demolished the block. A tank could push the rest of it out of the way to let the column through. By 7 p.m., the 333rd was riding again, except for the 3rd Battalion which was left behind to mop up at Bielefeld. The column passed Herford, about 9 miles from the Weser, before another road block, this one at an autobahn overpass, was encountered. It was quickly knocked out by tank fire. By 4 a.m., April 6, the 333rd began to assemble in the vicinity of Salzuflen, a mile from Herford, and to make preparations to cross the Weser.

Meanwhile, the 335th had already advanced within striking distance of the Weser. On April 4, after passing through Telgte the column went as far as Löhne, about 7 miles from the Weser at the nearest point, where it had to halt in the rear of the 5th Armored, which was maneuvering to break across the river. About a mile south of Minden, on the Weser, the 5th Armored hit a bridge and found a telephone into Minden that was still working. The burgermeister was called up and given until 8 p.m. to surrender the town. Meanwhile, the British were coming down fast just north of Minden. They could see the bridge, still in good condition, and decided to try to get across it on their own. Most of Minden is on the western bank of the Weser and the British entered the town without firing a shot. Two British officers were sent across the bridge to negotiate the surrender of the enemy troops on the other side. Just after the two officers crossed, the bridge was blown. It was not a serious blow to the British because they had crossed the Weser earlier in the afternoon in the vicinity of Petershagen, about 7 miles north of Minden. For the 5th Armored and ourselves, however, another crossing was necessary in our zone.

On the night of April 4-5, the 335th was assembled in the vicinity of Bahnhof Löhne, 5 miles from the Weser, preparing to cross over. The 334th was also getting into position. By 6 p.m., April 4, this column had moved over the autobahn to the bridge outside Bad Oeynhausen, only about 2 miles from the Weser at the nearest point.

The trip from the Rhine to the Weser, more than 100 miles, was made in four days by most of the 84th. At the Weser, the drive for us took a more serious turn. It was in the next phase that most of the fighting and chasing took place on our own account.

Road Blocks and Burgermeisters

Tactically, the chief problem as far as the Weser and also beyond the Weser was road blocks. This was the main form which German resistance took and it is worth some explanation because virtually the same situation was encountered again and again.

Most of the road blocks were comparatively simple affairs consisting of wooden piles, about a foot in diameter, driven into the ground in a compact circle on each side of the road. The piles were 5 to 10 feet above the ground. The cylinder of piles was filled with gravel, dirt, crushed rock, or some other handy material. The size of the cylinders depended on the road features, but, in general, they were designed to fill the gaps between natural obstacles on the sides of the roads and the road itself. The space between the two cylinders also varied but it was seldom large enough to permit two 2½-ton trucks to pass. This space was blocked by a center obstruction such as trucks, cars, and wagons. One novel obstruction, not previously encountered, was an iron roller with one side flattened. The rollers were found in two general sizes, the smaller from 4 to 6 feet in diameter, the larger from 8 to 10 feet. They were rolled to the road block, placed with the flat side on the ground, and then filled with stone, gravel, or dirt.

"The efficiency of these road blocks depended entirely on the covering fire power, and since fire power at best was limited, they failed to hold up the advance of the combat troops," was the opinion of Lt. Col. John H. Morava, commanding officer of the 309th Engineer (C) Battalion. "Many of them were not manned while some did not have obstructions in the center and others were not completed. Two hours was approximately the maximum time it took the infantry to wipe out the covering fire but the blocks still formed a bottleneck for the heavy traffic which followed. The

average time for tearing down a block was 20 minutes, although the more elaborate blocks took longer."

Politically, the problems east of the Rhine were typical of our experiences. By covering so much ground so quickly, we overran hundreds of cities, towns, and villages, their populations intact or swollen with refugees and "displaced persons," that curious, official name for Germany's army of forced laborers. In these towns, our military government section, under Major Frank E. Green, and our counterintelligence detachment, under Lt. Charles A. Rountree, began to work overtime. One of the unforgettable sights of the entire battle of Germany was the endless lines of DP's on the roads, shoving, pulling, carrying all their worldly possessions, ready to walk 100 or more miles to breathe freely again. To the frequent German claim that the DP's were not mistreated in Germany, it was merely necessary to ask: "And why do you think people who were not mistreated are willing to walk more than 100 miles to get out of this happy land?"

Although we were not staying very long in any one place, it was still necessary to cope with the political problem of cleaning out the Nazi administrations and putting in new officials who at minimum would not constitute a menace to our advance. Some of the characters who came to the attention of our military government section were worth studying for their contributions to the German problem as a whole.

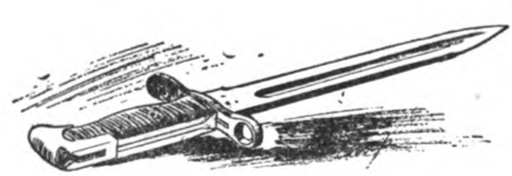
At Warendorf, about 60 miles from the Rhine, the burgermeister, owner of a large factory, was very energetic and efficient. He claimed that he had been appointed assistant burgermeister four months earlier but had been forced out a week before our arrival because an ardent Nazi, one of the town officials, had informed against him. He explained that he was reinstated by the military commandant of the town "because he was the only one who could keep the people going." To show his initiative, he had already hired 100 policemen, provided them with arm bands, and it was merely necessary to take over his setup. When we wanted some handbills printed, he was able to get them done quickly. He carried out suggestions immediately. Nevertheless, when the 84th Artillery happened to go through his house in search of a suitable headquarters, seven pistols were found which he had failed to turn in. An investigation followed. It turned out that his factory had been manufacturing war heads and shells for 88's, not the comparatively harmless material which he had reported.

At Herford, on the other hand, it was very difficult to get a man to take the job of burgermeister. There were two possibilities, one a hardheaded businessman who knew nothing about civil administration and the other an

old civil servant who was not efficient. The latter was chosen as the lesser evil with the thought that units behind us could make a more careful check.

At Bielefeld, the problem was especially difficult. The burgermeister was an ignorant, bitter Nazi who had to get out. All previous burgermeisters were either in concentration camps or graves. Our military government representative, Captain Herbert B. Fried, arranged a meeting with representative leaders of the community. They confessed that they did not know anyone who was not pro-Nazi and capable of handling the town administration. The Catholic priest proposed an old Prussian Junker who was driven out of his official post in 1937, but the latter was not willing to take the job. He insisted on calling a town meeting which engaged in an interminable debate. He finally accepted after it was made clear that a burgermeister would be put in anyway if he could not be agreed on.

In Bielefeld also, the problem of public order was unusually tense for 24 hours. On the morning of April 5, the 333rd's 3rd Battalion began to clean up the town. At first, both civilians and DP's seemed relieved and surprised but soon they were also hungry for anything they could get their hands on. One large flour mill was securely locked but a crowd of 150-200 women, most of whom had worked there, found a way in through a chute down which the grain was dumped. Company I broke up the affair which threatened to develop into a riot. Another crowd invaded a large storehouse and began to carry away the food stores. They also found the wine cellar and proceeded to drink too much. The party was quickly degenerating into a free-for-all. Company I had to restore order and rigid patrolling was necessary that night to prevent more incidents.



CHAPTER XIII

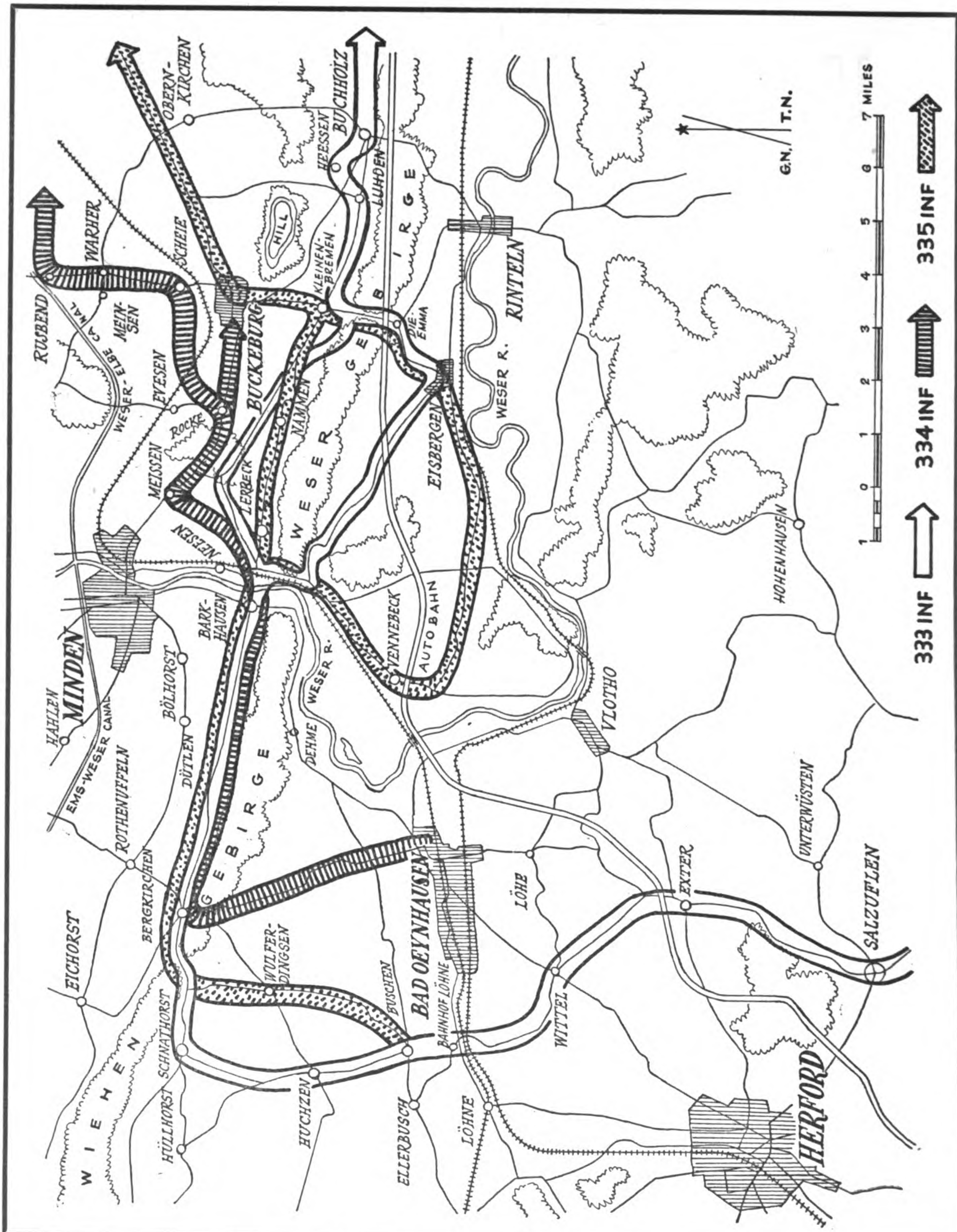
Across the Weser

In the entire drive from the Rhine to the Elbe, probably the most important and difficult single operation was the Weser crossing. It was not possible to make the elaborate and detailed plans and preparations which had worked out so effectively in the Roer crossing, nor was the overwhelming concentration of force of the Rhine crossing available.

Three major problems were involved. First, it was again impossible to make the crossing on a broad front. Originally, it was planned to cross in the vicinity of the blown bridge near Minden (Map 13). The engineers could have used it as a base for a new bridge and it would have given us a broad front from the Weser Gebirge (Hills) to Minden. But the British were in Minden. We had to choose, therefore, between a narrow front on the northern or the southern side of the Weser Gebirge.

Second, equipment was lacking. The 84th had no treadway equipment of its own and the 909th Treadway Bridge Company, in support of the 5th Armored, was the only treadway unit in the area. The 554th Heavy Ponton Battalion, still near the Rhine, was the only other bridging unit for 100 miles back. On the morning of April 5, General Bolling had to go to the XIII Corps and the 5th Armored to obtain the assistance of the 22nd Armored Engineers and to procure the necessary engineer equipment. As soon as he returned, he called a meeting of the combat team commanders and plans for the river crossing were completed.

Third, the terrain was complicated. South of Minden, the Weser bends into a horseshoe shape. Just above the bend, the Weser Gebirge, a rather high, heavily wooded ridge, cuts across the river. The river and the ridge almost form a right angle. There is a small gap between the river and the ridge on the west bank but none on the east bank. Only one road goes up to the west bank through the ridge and it is under full observation from the east side as long as it stays south of the gap. Another road about 3 miles west of the river also crosses the gap.



13. ACROSS THE WESER

As far as the Weser, we were moving south of the Weser Gebirge and it was from that side that we first tried to cross. On the morning of April 5, the 335th's 1st Battalion drove up in trucks to the vicinity of Dehme. From there, the battalion planned to walk through the gap and make the crossing at 10 a.m. near the town of Barkhausen. The trucks got as far as Dehme but the enemy's observation was too good to get by. One observer reported: "All hell broke loose when the 1st Battalion detrucked. The enemy had a number of 20 mm. and 88 mm. guns and heavy mortars emplaced north and south of the ridge line on the east bank of the river. Observation was perfect. They picked off engineer trucks and other vehicles like ducks on a pond. The ridge line and eastern bank of the river were infested with snipers."

The result was that the approach to the crossing site from the southern side of the Weser Gebirge was accepted as too expensive and the effort was not pushed. It was decided to cut through the Weser Gebirge farther west before making the crossing.

The Weser Crossing

The actual crossing site, Barkhausen, was just north of the Weser Gebirge. The northern boundary of the bridgehead was the Minden-Rocke road, the southern boundary the autobahn. From an engineering standpoint, this was not a particularly good place to cross because the approaches to the bridges were soft. From a tactical standpoint, however, it was the best available place. Only from the flanks was the enemy able to place direct fire on the bridgehead, and the Weser Gebirge protected the flanks as soon as the troops crossed the river. There was a certain psychological advantage which played in our favor. The "logical" place for the crossing was near Minden or else south of the Weser Gebirge in the general direction of our drive. By choosing a place that was not near Minden and yet north of the Weser Gebirge, it was possible to stab at a spot which was less suspicious than any other.

From our experience on April 5, it was known that the enemy had strong positions south of the Weser Gebirge in the pocket formed by the Weser Gebirge and the river. We figured that the pocket could be cleaned out after the bridgehead was secured.

The 335th was selected to establish the bridgehead. Its 1st Battalion was chosen to cross first in assault boats, consolidate on the eastern bank, then strike out in the center of the division's zone. Its 3rd Battalion would also

cross in assault boats, then turn south. With these two battalions in the bridgehead, the engineers could build a footbridge and an infantry support bridge. Then its 2nd Battalion would cross and clear the northern part of the zone. The 3rd Battalion was also ordered to cross the autobahn as quickly as possible in order to clear the area between the autobahn and the river.

At 5 a.m., April 6, under cover of darkness, the 1st Battalion began to cross in assault boats that had been brought up by the 309th Engineers. Near Barkhausen, the western bank sloped gradually to the water's edge so that the launching was easy. Thirty-five boats made the initial crossing, including Company A and Company C.

This time the surprise was perfect. The first wave landed on the enemy's bank without a shot fired. It was about 5:30 a.m. A German 20 mm. gun was firing sporadically south of the crossing site but evidently the gunners had no idea a crossing was taking place because they were so erratic. Once on solid ground again, a few incidents popped up. The two companies had advanced to the road about 150 yards from the shore and were moving into the town of Lerbeck. A German sentry, standing beside another German soldier, cried "Halt!" Cpl. Burley A. Nichols was nearest them. He was afraid to fire lest his shot alert the enemy in the whole area. Instead, he broke his carbine over the head of the sentry. Then he stooped down, picked up the German's rifle, and repeated the performance on the second German. Pfc. Richard C. Ehmann hit the ground as an enemy machine gun opened up in his direction. A German concussion grenade rolled over his right hand. Ehmann flipped away the grenade and hugged the ground, waiting for the explosion. It came quickly. So did a scream. Apparently the German was hit by his own grenade. Otherwise, Lerbeck was easy. The entire 1st Battalion was across the river by 5:54 a.m.

The 3rd Battalion began to cross at 6:10 a.m., also in assault boats. Surprise was still working for us. By 6:30 a.m., the battalion was almost across without opposition. The last group was going over when the enemy woke up. Machine guns, 20 mm. anti-aircraft guns, mortars, and two 128 mm. railroad guns concentrated on the crossing site. Despite the heavy fire, the 3rd Battalion crossed by 6:35 a.m. without a casualty.

The 2nd Battalion started to cross immediately though the enemy had opened up with everything he had. Light was just breaking through. Most of the German fire was coming from the railroad embankment on the east shore of the Weser, north of the crossing site. The railroad guns were causing the most trouble. The 2nd Platoon of Company C, 638th Tank Destroyer Battalion, was sent north of the bridgehead to fire on anything hostile mov-

ing south. The tank destroyers fired 30 rounds and knocked out both railroad guns besides 15 cars of ammunition and supplies and a fuel depot. At the same time, machine guns were set up on the near shore to cover the crossing. By keeping up a stream of fire, they forced the enemy machine guns to shoot wild. It was noted that the Germans put up a rather good fight to prevent the crossing but surrendered very readily as soon as they were confronted. Not a man was lost by the 2nd Battalion, too, in the actual crossing, a very high commendation for the selection of the crossing site.

Meanwhile, as the 2nd Battalion was crossing the river, the 1st Battalion was pushing out, enlarging the bridgehead. On the road from Lerbeck to Nammen, the 1st Battalion was hit by the first enemy counterattack. Three medium tanks, a self-propelled gun, and about 40 German infantrymen were involved. Company A took shelter in the buildings scattered along the road. While the self-propelled gun shelled the houses, the German infantry tried to move into them. After about a dozen Germans were shot up, the rest withdrew to the north of Nammen together with the self-propelled gun and the tanks. Company A proceeded into Nammen, found it empty, and the men grabbed their first sleep, a couple of hours, in two days.

The bridges were also going up. Work on the approaches to the treadway and infantry support bridges, 150 yards from each other, began at 11:30 a.m., in the face of enemy artillery fire. The infantry support bridge was completed by the 171st Engineer (C) Battalion at 7:30 p.m. for all loads up to 2½-ton trucks. There were no special engineering problems. The current of the river was estimated at 3 to 4 feet per second, not rapid enough to create any difficulties. The treadway bridge, built by the 22nd Armored Engineer Battalion, was finished at 9 p.m. The approaches to the two bridges proved more difficult to construct than did the bridges themselves. The banks were soft and truckloads of bricks and rubble had to be dumped to build a foundation for a route to the shores.

The 1st Battalion was not through for the day. Its next objective was Kleinenbremen, about 6 miles from the Weser (Map 13). It was estimated that a battalion of German infantrymen were holding the town. Company A marched within sight of Kleinenbremen but held up outside because 800 yards of open ground had to be covered without tank or artillery support in broad daylight. Before dusk, however, three light tanks of Company D, 771st Tank Battalion, joined the infantry and moved a half mile to the northwest in order to attack over a broad bare hill and so avoid a German anti-tank gun that was staring down the road which led into town. Company C's riflemen, Company D's heavy machine guns, and the three tanks opened up

with everything they had. Most of the enemy force withdrew toward Buckeburg. Those who stayed behind were finished off quickly. The 1st Battalion hauled up in Kleinenbremen for the night. The 3rd Battalion headed south from the bridgehead and reached its objective, the autobahn, before dark. The 2nd Battalion was able to get to the Minden-Rocke road, near Rocke.

On the night of April 6, then, the Weser bridgehead was firm. It was about 6 miles deep and 3 miles broad. An entire combat team was safely over and two substantial bridges were operating. The 335th captured over 1400 prisoners, as well as large stores of weapons and ammunition of all types, on April 6. The enemy's guns which were responsible for the difficulty in the attempted crossing the day before were located and neutralized. The next big objective was the city of Hannover on the Leine River, approximately 30 miles away.

Action at Eisbergen

East of the Weser River, the Weser Gebirge divided the 84th's zone into two distinct sectors for all practical purposes. The 335th combat team was still leading the way, the 3rd Battalion in the southern sector, between the river and the ridge, the 1st Battalion in the northern sector, between the river and our left flank. The other two combat teams were coming up fast to take over the pursuit. The 334th crossed the Weser on the night of April 6-7, the 333rd on the afternoon of April 7. The 334th headed for the northern sector, the 333rd for the southern. In the northern sector, the immediate objective was Buckeburg, about 6 miles from the Weser, in the southern sector Eisbergen, about 8 miles from the Weser.

In the southern sector, the 335th's 3rd Battalion jumped off at 6:45 a.m., April 7, to clear the area between the autobahn and the Weser River. By 9 a.m., Company K and tanks of the 3rd Platoon, Company C, 771st Tank Battalion, came to the edge of Eisbergen (Map 13). The leading tank drove boldly into the town and fired its machine gun down the center of the main street. The first reply was only a few shots from small arms. Suddenly, a German anti-tank gun blazed away at the tank from a nicely covered position. The tank was hit but managed to withdraw. Next, the anti-tank went after the infantry and forced Company K to dive into near-by trenches and houses.

To get rid of this gun, Company K's 2nd Platoon tried to outflank it and

come at it from the north. At first the maneuver seemed easy. A stretch of open ground which might have given them trouble was negotiated without resistance and nine prisoners gave themselves up readily. But just as the platoon arrived at the northern edge of the town, small arms, mortars, bazookas, and a second anti-tank gun found them. The platoon's casualties were very heavy and the attempt had to be given up. Although our artillery was called down on the town, the German guns were not silenced and Company K was stuck.

By 4 p.m., however, the 333rd's 1st Battalion was nearing Eisbergen from another direction. Company B's infantry were riding some tanks of the 771st's Company B. Strangely enough Company K's commander, Lt. John J. Ennis, heard that the 333rd was going to join the attack but spent the rest of the day vainly trying to learn what the result was. The 335th's Company K had to sweat it out at one end of town while the 333rd's Company B was driving a hard bargain at the other end but neither was able to clarify the situation for the other.

At the outskirts of Eisbergen, the 333rd's 1st Battalion also felt the fire of the two enemy anti-tank guns. Company B dismounted and prepared to assault the German positions. At the northwestern edge of the town, the 2nd Platoon spotted a shape that looked like a camouflaged tank. Lt. Robert L. Tingley stopped a civilian and sent him to the tank with a demand of surrender. A German lieutenant came back, carrying a flag of truce. What was such a conversation like? Lt. Tingley told him to give up. The German replied that, as an officer for six years, he was trained to fight to the end. Lt. Tingley promised to treat all prisoners fairly. The German asked for five minutes to talk to his commanding officer. It was granted. After five minutes, he came back and asked for fifteen. He was given five more minutes and told that was final. When he did not come back Company B opened up. The enemy anti-tank gun knocked out one of our tanks but, in half an hour, all enemy firing in Eisbergen was over.

The 1st Battalion waited for darkness before entering the town after an artillery barrage. Nine large caliber railroad guns were seized together with stores of small arms and 136 prisoners. Some of the Company K's men were freed. The German lieutenant who had talked to Lt. Tingley was found dead. Eisbergen was clear by midnight. The 335th's 3rd Battalion went into Eisbergen the next morning, April 8, but by that time both the Germans and the 333rd were gone. The Company K men were not quite sure why it was so easy after the hard battle the day before, and the Company B men

were not quite sure why the Germans did not fight harder because they did not know about the hard battle the day before—a striking example of how some actions have to be pieced together.

Buckeburg Next

Stronger resistance was met in the sector north of the Weser Gebirge. Two columns were moving toward Buckeburg, the 334th combat team from the west and the 335th's 3rd Battalion from the south, the former from the direction of Meissen, the latter from the direction of Kleinenbremen.

At 7 a.m., April 7, the 334th's 3rd Battalion and the 771st's Company A tanks had to shoot their way through Rocke, about 2 miles west of Buckeburg. Other units had already passed through but the enemy had returned and set up new positions outside the town. Company L was mounted on the tanks. Small arms fire was the first notice that the enemy was back. The infantry jumped down and cleaned out some houses along the road. Back on the tanks, they came to a road block a few minutes later. The leading tank stopped about 25 yards from the block as the enemy opened up with small arms from the woods on both sides of the road. Again the infantry dismounted and took to the houses. By jumping from house to house, they worked their way up to the block. The Germans withdrew to prepared dugouts behind the road block, still somewhat outside Rocke.

When the entire company had reached the forward house, one squad at a time moved out to clean out the dugouts. Lt. Frederick M. McConnell, Company L's commander, said that for once in the drive from the Rhine to the Elbe, the enemy's resistance was "fanatical." They fired grimly at the charging doughboys and refused to surrender. Few prisoners were taken. Some Germans managed to withdraw into the town. Once free of the dugouts, Company L and the tanks entered Rocke, but the German fire was still intense. Aided by artillery and tanks, the infantry took over. Rocke was cleared by noon and Companies I and K moved through to get at Buckeburg. In the afternoon, a German aid man surrendered to Company M in Rocke. He admitted that many soldiers were hiding but felt that most were willing to surrender if they could do so safely. He was sent out and returned with 70-80 prisoners, simplifying the problem of the whole advance.

In early afternoon, Buckeburg was attacked. So many enemy troops had fallen back to Buckeburg from both Rocke and Kleinenbremen, and the

enemy's dug-in positions were so substantial, that a hard fight was clearly indicated. The 334th's 3rd Battalion was not deceived. About 500 yards from Buckeburg, Company I on the right and Company K on the left were greeted with an exceptionally large variety of fire, small arms, automatic weapons, self-propelled guns, and tanks. Our tanks and artillery fired back but the enemy's guns could not be shaken out. As a result, a defensive line was established outside the town for the rest of the day and night. It was not often in the drive from the Rhine to the Elbe that the enemy's fire was so thick that our infantry could not stick their heads above their foxholes, but Buckeburg was one of those times.

And yet, the next morning, Buckeburg fell. The reason was that we were able to hit it from another direction. Having broken into Kleinenbremen on the night of April 7, while Buckeburg was holding out against the attack from the west, the 335th's 1st Battalion was able to strike a second blow at Buckeburg in a very short time, but this one from the south. From Kleinenbremen to Buckeburg was little more than a mile. At 2 a.m., April 8, Company C jumped off, followed by Company A and B. A half hour later, Company C was held up by strong points between Kleinenbremen and Buckeburg. Artillery was placed on them and the company was able to clear them by 4:30 a.m. From then on, the column advanced with armor in front and heavy machine guns on the flanks into the town. The 1st and 2nd Platoons of the 771st's Company C and one of Company D's platoons provided the tanks, the 638th TD Battalion's Company C provided one platoon of tank destroyers. By 6 a.m., two enemy self-propelled guns, three volkswagons, and 412 prisoners were accounted for. There were four road blocks in the town and each one had to be given individual treatment. The rest of the day was spent paying house-to-house visits cleaning out the town sector by sector. By dark, April 8, Buckeburg was safe.

It is interesting to note that the experiences of the 335th and 333rd at Eisbergen on April 7 and the experiences of the 334th and 335th at Buckeburg on April 8 were basically the same. The first attack on the towns from one direction met strong and successful resistance. But as soon as another push was launched from another direction, the enemy gave in. The one-two punch was peculiarly effective. Apparently the enemy, even when he did have enough fighting spirit left to put up a respectable show of opposition, was not overenthusiastic and a strong, swift follow-up was too much for his morale. A two-directional attack gave him the feeling that the odds were overwhelming or that encirclement was imminent. As a result, the second

attack capitalized on the efforts of the first and we were never held up for more than a few hours even when the enemy chose to make us pay for a town.

Nevertheless, the resistance of the Germans east of the Weser in the rectangle formed by the towns of Rocke, Nammen, Kleinenbremen, and Buckeburg was the strongest and most persistent in the entire drive. Buckeburg was the anchor of this whole position and, once it fell, we were able to break out into the open again. Looking back, it was fortunate that we were able to cross the Weser itself so efficiently. The enemy had enough force behind the Weser, not far from our crossing site, to have made considerable trouble if he had put up a more aggressive fight for the line of the river. Instead, he was caught by surprise and gave up the river without too much difficulty. By the time he woke up to the danger, he was forced on the defensive again and merely tried to hold out in a number of strong points. It was too late. We had enough force across to make even his best efforts relatively futile.

Fast Company

In the first 48 hours after the Weser crossing, April 6-7, the 84th traveled approximately 6 miles. In the next 24 hours, April 8, we covered approximately 25 miles. There was no doubt that the enemy's crust of resistance on the east side of the Weser was definitely and finally broken.

While the 335th was taking Buckeburg, the 334th went around Buckeburg to the north in the direction of Stadthagen, about 9 miles northeast, and the 333rd crossed over the north of the Weser Gebirge at the Die Emma gap (Map 13). From April 8 on, the entire division was moving north of the ridge which thus became the right flank of the division's advance. The reduction of the enemy's strong points east of the Weser, and the fact that we were able to shake off the Weser Gebirge, which had cut our forces in two, gave the entire drive a new and powerful momentum.

On April 8, which was virtually a break-through from the Weser to Hannover, there were some incidents but so much ground was covered that they were relatively minor and episodic. Just east of Buckeburg was a large woody hill, the Bucke Berg (Hill), which could have slowed us down. The 334th went around this hill to the north, the 333rd to the south. Though some German forces were hiding out in the woods, they could be dealt with later by mopping-up units.

While the 334th's 3rd Battalion stayed in position in front of Buckeburg on April 7, the rest of the 334th went around Buckeburg to the north. When the 335th attacked the town the next day, the 3rd Battalion also bypassed the town and joined the combat team. The 334th ran into a few snipers in a barn at the outskirts of Warher, about 2 miles north of Buckeburg. The leading tanks set the barn afire and the column moved on. Halfway between Warher and Rusbend (Map 13), another mile north, the column overtook an enemy convoy, including several half-tracks, three trucks, and a tank. It was just about dark, our tanks blasted away, the tank and at least one half-track were destroyed, the rest scattered. At Rusbend, Company A dismounted and preceded the column on foot toward Stadthagen (Map 16). East of Stadthagen, a passenger bus carrying five German soldiers and a German staff car in which a major and two lieutenants were calmly listening to the radio, joined the 334th's column. These uninvited guests were allowed to ride along for a short distance, then some infantrymen dashed past the two vehicles, firing as they went by, forcing the bus and car to the side. The result was eight more prisoners and something to break the monotony of the night march.

From Stadthagen on, 15 miles were covered with a minimum of difficulty. Some road blocks were encountered but they were not serious. At the autobahn, the column received some mortar and sniper fire but it kept on moving, meanwhile firing all weapons in the direction of the enemy's fire. The objective on April 8 was the Leine River. About 3 miles west of the Leine, near the autobahn overpass at Holtensen (Map 14), enemy time fire began to move up and down the column. Artillery immediately went into position. The 334th's Company B was sent forward to clean out the enemy's positions. Everyone joined in and even the company cooks captured a number of snipers in one house. Sixteen 88's were overrun. Company A went through Holtensen by noon. Both companies joined to attack Dedensen, about a mile from the Leine. The assault was launched under some artillery fire, and the companies received some small arms fire from houses in the town and the bridge over a canal. The town was taken by 3:30 p.m. and two bridges over the canal and a bridge over the autobahn were also captured intact. When Dedensen was cleared, Company A was ordered to attack Gümmer, about 400 yards from the Leine, and Company B went out to get the autobahn bridge over the Leine about 500 yards north of Gümmer. Gümmer was taken by 11 p.m. and the bridge was seized before the enemy was able to destroy it. The day's advance put the 334th only about 7 miles west of Hannover.

Meanwhile, the 333rd was moving in the southern lane of the division's zone, under the Bucke Berg, at the same pace. But, before the 333rd could break out into the open for a long drive, it had to sweep aside a pocket of resistance which threatened to hold it up for more than half a day.

The column crossed the Weser Gebirge at Die Emma on the night of April 7-8 and went on to Luhden, about 8 miles east of the Weser, with little difficulty (Map 13). The 333rd's 2nd Battalion and the 771st's Company B were leading. Two bus loads of enemy soldiers were overtaken in the vicinity of Luhden. Outside Luhden, however, the 2nd Battalion had to fight its way into the town.

At 8 a.m., enemy fire from small arms, panzerfausts, and nebelwerfers was received at the outskirts of Heessen, less than a mile northeast of Luhden. The 2nd Battalion detrucked and moved on the village by foot. On the right side, Company G and 50 German soldiers went at each other for two hours. Company E was also strongly opposed on the left side. In a wooded area southeast of Heessen, about 75 enemy soldiers put up some stiff resistance for about three hours. They refused to surrender and not a single prisoner was taken. No quarter was given on either side; one of our aid men was fired at flagrantly as he tried to evacuate wounded.

From Heessen, the column headed southeast toward Buchholz, less than a mile away. Company G was left behind to clear it, while the rest of the combat team moved on. It was already about 3 p.m. and progress had been relatively slow. But once Buchholz was bypassed, the situation changed suddenly. A wild ride in the Roer-Rhine phase was 5-10 miles a day. A wild ride in the Rhine-Elbe phase was much faster and farther. In the next four hours, the 333rd traveled about 30 miles, as far as the town of Weetzen, only 7 miles from the heart of Hannover (Map 16). Towns and villages were passed without the slightest incident. The column was more than able to make up for the morning's delay.

There was no need to take prisoners. They came to the side of the road and started walking back in file by themselves or they were waved back. The leading elements could not bother with a few thousand prisoners who, not so long ago, would have represented a good month's haul, and left them for the rear to pick up. In a large woods between Nienstedt and Egestorf, midway in the journey, a French labor camp was liberated. These woods were evidently used as a supply depot because so much equipment was scattered under the trees.

At Weetzen, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion was leading. As Company E neared the town, a stop was made at a road fork. Some enemy soldiers and

vehicles were seen down the right fork and some activity to the left. A civilian rode up in a bicycle and reported that a number of enemy soldiers wanted to surrender if they would not be shot. Arrangements were made and about 60 prisoners came in. The rest of the battalion stayed in Weetzen that evening but, at midnight, another trip of about 9 miles had to be made to the northwest to put the combat team in a position to join in the attack on Hannover. All through the night, April 8-9, the column was once more on the move and by morning was settled in Gross Munzel, about 11 miles west of the center of Hannover (Map 16).

In Front of Hannover

By April 9, we were ready to take on Hannover, the twelfth largest city in Germany, the largest single objective ever assigned to the 84th. The problem was how to capture a city of such proportions, with a normal population of about 475,000, without losing our momentum. A number of things worked out in our favor.

On the night of April 8, the 333rd's 2nd Battalion took a prisoner who was carrying a map of Hannover's defenses. Happily the map was drawn very accurately. More information from civilians, foreign laborers, and other prisoners confirmed the basic information in this captured map. It was evident that Hannover's main defenses were almost entirely to the south and southwest of the city. The German command expected us to strike from that direction. Our alternative was clear.

Later, we picked up more information about the preparations to defend Hannover. The military commander of Hannover was Brigadier General Lohning. Only a week before, the city was visited by the army commander, General Blaskowitz, who ordered Hannover defended to the end. General Lohning demanded reinforcements, General Blaskowitz agreed to send them. When they never arrived, however, General Lohning considered his position hopeless. Nevertheless, since we could not know this then, our plans involved no chances and we were prepared for any eventuality.

The plan of attack against Hannover was based on the information that the city's defenses were concentrated in the south and southwest. Our forces, therefore, were concentrated to the north and northwest. All three combat teams formed an arc around that side of the city to come down the Weser-Elbe Canal to the north and across the Leine River to the west.

On April 9, the 334th assembled on the extreme left flank of the arc

around Engelbostel, about 6 miles to the northwest (Map 14). In the middle, the 333rd assembled around Meyenfeld, a little farther away. At the bottom of the arc, on the right flank, the 335th assembled around Kirchwehren, about 5 miles south of Meyenfeld. The division's command post moved to Bad Nenndorf, behind the arc.

In order to get to its assembly area, the 334th had to clear out some enemy pockets. At Horst, about 5 miles west of Engelbostel, a self-propelled 88 nosed out of town and fired at the column, the 334th's 2nd Battalion and the 771st's Company A leading. Our first three tanks immediately fanned out and fired at the enemy gun almost simultaneously. When the smoke had cleared, it looked as if all three tanks had scored a direct hit. Fifteen unmanned 105 mm. guns were captured in Horst.

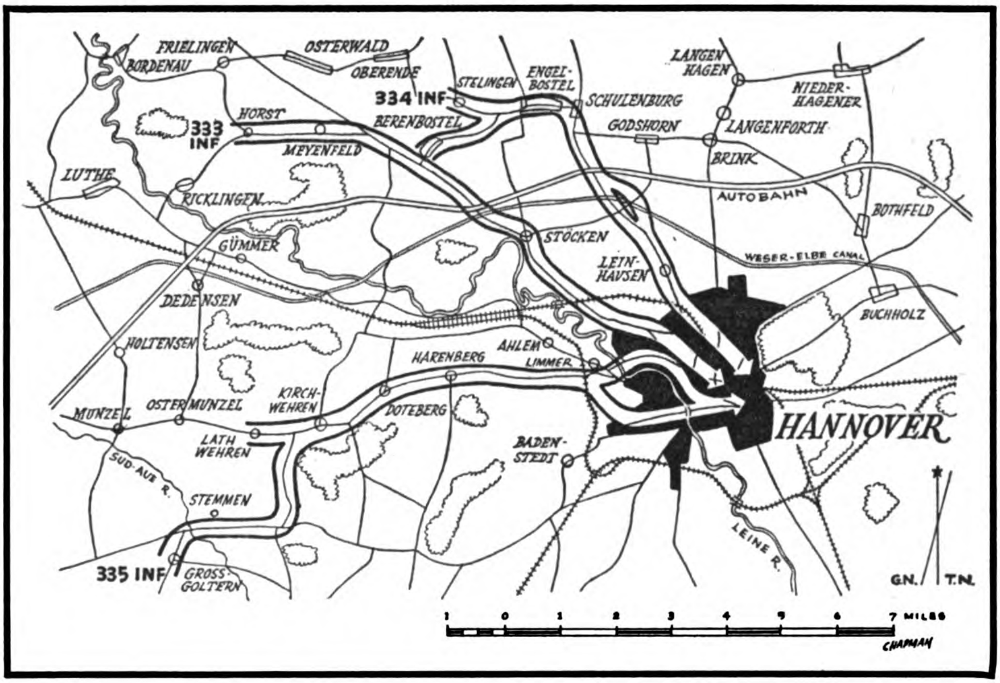
Near Engelbostel, the 334th's 3rd Battalion spotted 50-75 German soldiers running through the fields. Small arms forced them to pop into a ditch. Companies K and L went into Engelbostel, Company I and a tank destroyer were left behind to clean out the ditch. After an artillery concentration was placed on the area, Company I mopped up fast. In Engelbostel itself, the situation was more confused. As the two companies entered the town, three enemy tanks and several soldiers fled toward Schulenburg, about 700 yards east. One tank was knocked out by a direct hit. There was no organized resistance in Engelbostel. The enemy soldiers dashed from building to building but most of them were captured before they could get out.

From Gross Munzel, the 333rd went to Meyenfeld, arriving at about 7:30 p.m. The main bridge over the Weser-Elbe Canal, northwest of Hannover, was blown just as the 2nd Battalion showed up. The 335th's S-3, Major William T. Harlan, paid high tribute to the colored quartermaster truck drivers on this trip. "Battalion officers agreed that they were the best drivers the unit ever had," he said. "When the column was halted by enemy fire and it was necessary to clean out resistance, the drivers would grab their rifles and go forward with the infantry. They suffered several casualties."

But by the time we were ready to attack Hannover, we had other troubles with trucks. The division had crossed the Rhine with six truck companies, or 264 2½-ton trucks, enough for complete motorization. On the very first day, Army called back two truck companies. Not enough trucks were left to move the division but ways were found to do so anyway. In front of Hannover, however, two more truck companies were taken away and the problem became very acute.

At Bad Nenndorf a solution was improvised. A caravan of captured German vehicles, which was enough to move an entire regiment, was put to-

gether by the 784th Ordnance Company. To make up for the lost quartermaster trucks, 4 buses, 8 half-tracks, 35 trucks, and 55 four-wheeled trailers, besides 23 United States weasels, were pressed into service. Some of them were not much better than junk but they were used as long as they moved and nothing better was available. This desperate measure by our G-4 (Supply) helped us to move into Hannover where the junk was thrown away and better captured enemy vehicles were substituted.



14. THE CAPTURE OF HANNOVER

As for the detailed plan of attack on Hannover, two battalions of each regiment were ordered to make the assault. The 334th's 2nd and 3rd Battalions had to seize two bridges over the Weser-Elbe canal and attack the city from the north. The 333rd's 1st and 2nd Battalions had to seize bridges over the Sarne Canal and attack the city from the northwest. The 335th's 1st and 2nd Battalions would attack from the west, and seize the built-up area west of the Leine River and secure bridges over the river. Hannover itself was divided into sectors and each battalion was given a sector of the city to clear.

Hannover Next

On April 10, the weather was fighting for us. A heavy fog covered the entire area. It was hard for the enemy to detect our intentions from hour to hour or to bring accurate fire on us after he did so. Hannover was ripe.

At the northern end of our arc, the 334th's 2nd Battalion was off first. Company F, reinforced by a platoon of heavy machine guns and a section of heavy mortars, was given the mission of seizing two bridges over the Weser-Elbe Canal. If these bridges were taken without difficulty, Company E was then to pass through and plunge south into Hannover. If the enemy was able to put up a fight for the bridges, the rest of the 2nd Battalion could carry on the attack on Hannover. Such was the plan.

Company F jumped off at about 2 a.m., April 10 (Map 14). The enemy was dug in between Godshorn and the autobahn but, by moving very quietly in the night and mist, the company bypassed them. The next touchy moment was at an autobahn underpass. Scouts spied a Jagd Panther tank, one of the enemy's newest types, under the bridge. Its big gun was pointed north and its machine guns were covering the line of advance. The column crossed the autobahn west of the underpass, went into the edge of a woods to the south, circled back to the east, and hit the road into Hannover without arousing the tank's crew. Some of the men passed within 20 yards of the tank. The second obstacle was also bypassed.

One Company E man may have saved us from a good deal of embarrassment. As the middle of the column was making this detour of the tank, Pfc. Robert E. Epley, a short, light chap, noticed a dim, gray figure on the road. The latter could not be seen clearly but Epley thought that a bazooka slung over his shoulder looked suspiciously like a German one. Epley stepped up and tapped him on the shoulder. The figure wheeled around. He was a German soldier armed with a machine pistol as well as a bazooka. Epley knocked the bazooka to the ground, grabbed the machine pistol and tore it away, swung for the German's jaw, and stretched him out. Company E's commander, Lt. William W. Thompson, gave Epley credit for an important assist. Had the German given the alarm, the tank might have gone into action, and it was in a perfect position to spray the whole column.

As it was, the operation was a complete surprise and the two Weser-Elbe Canal bridges were captured intact. In front of the first bridge, Company F picked up 13 prisoners, who were guarding it, without a fight. Half the company remained there and the other half continued on to the second

one. There was a short but sharp flurry. Two German officers, who had apparently walked off at the wrong time, came back and fired burp guns at those who remained behind. Two men fell, including a medic. Rifle fire quickly cut down the two officers. Company F also took the second bridge without resistance, capturing 12 men. This one was thoroughly mined and ready for detonation but the guards were never given a chance.

When the Germans did wake up, it was too late. From the bridge, Company E took over and ran down the road. Automatic weapons fire snapped. Some men went down. The gun was hidden in the fog but the likeliest place was the road. A few men took cover behind the houses at the side of the road and tried to get at the gun from behind. A BAR man, who did not even know where the gun was, walked straight up to it in the dark. The two Germans there surrendered immediately. At about 7 a.m., the tanks of the 771st's Company A came up. It was just about daybreak but still very foggy. A German half-track came out of a side road and joined our tanks, mistaking them for a German column. One tank fired at it but missed. The half-track let go with one burst. A moment later, it disappeared into the mist.

The 334th's 3rd Battalion followed the 2nd Battalion. Before crossing the canal, Company K captured the Jagd Panther tank beneath the underpass. It was manned by five German soldiers and a round was in the chamber. Instead of trying to shoot their way out, the crewmen gave up as soon as they saw they were surrounded. After crossing the two bridges, the 3rd Battalion turned east to its sector of Hannover.

In the center of the arc, the 333rd was also able to reach Hannover by daybreak. On the night of April 9-10 patrols were sent out by the 1st and 2nd Battalions to seize bridges over the Weser-Elbe Canal in their zones. The 2nd Battalion found two intact and took them. On one, nine 500-pound aerial bombs were set for detonation. The 1st Battalion was less lucky. A Company B patrol went halfway across a bridge but was forced back by a stream of enemy small arms fire. The bridge was soon blown and the 1st Battalion had to use the 2nd Battalion's bridges.

At 5 a.m., April 10, Companies F and G began to cross the bridges. An hour later, Company F had moved into a factory district east of the bridge while Company G was blocking one bridge area. The 1st Battalion reported one incident after crossing the canal. A Polish laborer warned Company C that five German soldiers behind a 20 mm. anti-aircraft gun were trying to ambush the column. A patrol flanked the gun, killed three of the crew, and captured two together with the gun. Company C then mounted tanks cf the

771st's Company B and roared into the outskirts of Hannover, firing everything they had. Companies A and B followed on foot. On the northwestern outskirts of the city, Company B passed a camp of 500 French forced laborers. The wires were cut and the Frenchmen stormed out of the place, shouting greetings and gratitude as only those who were truly liberated could.

The 2nd Battalion led the 335th's attack at the bottom of the arc from the west. The only serious resistance was met at a railroad overpass in the village of Limmer on the west bank of the Leine River. It was 5:50 a.m. About 75 German soldiers were waiting on the east side of the overpass. They were armed with rifles, panzerfausts, machine pistols, and at least one machine gun. Visibility here as elsewhere was terrible. Two squads of Company G went over the bridge. The tanks of the 771st's Company C and tank destroyers of the 638th's Company C were held back to preserve surprise. The two squads ran across the bridge before the enemy was aware of them. Then the Germans began to spray the area. The Germans were shooting blindly and the two squads managed to crawl back to the other side of the bridge. Both sides were popping away but no one was really able to aim. At this, the tanks and the 81 mm. mortar platoon were called forward.

Chief credit for disposing of this German pocket was given to the mortars. A forward observer on the bridge had to call down fire practically on himself. When the fire lifted, Company G moved across the bridge and counted 29 dead Germans on the other side. The rest were gone. Company G started down the main street of Limmer and Company E cleaned out the west side. Company F moved to the left and took a secondary route into Hannover.

By morning, then, all three combat teams were poised to enter the biggest objective in the history of the 84th. To do so, they had traveled 150 miles in nine days.



CHAPTER XIV

Elbe, We Are Here

HANNOVER fell quickly and easily, partly because General Lohning was never able to organize a real defense, partly because our preparation was so thorough and the surprise element so demoralizing. A Volkssturm was patched together in March but it was dissolved two days before our arrival. General Lohning tried frantically to reorganize the available civilians into a defense force but it was too late. The authorities were no longer able to control the civilians whose interest in the war was by now strictly personal. When our three columns entered the city the "wrong way," as far as the German defenses were concerned, little was there to stop us or even to hold us up.

As our tanks and infantry came in, their greatest difficulty was to get through the crowds of forced laborers who swarmed in the streets cheering and celebrating. For the most part, the German population stayed indoors. The city was notably lacking in white flags, an indication that the mood was much more hostile or at least much cooler than in the cities and towns west of Hannover. The foreign laborers were ragged, sickly, undisciplined but violently enthusiastic. They offered bottles of wine to our men and flung flowers into the vehicles. As our columns entered the city from three directions, the most noteworthy thing was this emotional explosion.

The 334th's 2nd Battalion had some typical experiences. Three German vehicles and a new 88 mm. gun rumbled down one street. A sergeant and three men took over the convoy without a shot. One officer went into the cellar of a store. The word spread and the store was jammed. When he came out of the cellar, the store was so crowded that he was unable to get through to the street. He fired his revolver into the air and the crowd separated as if a shell had gone through it. He dashed through the opening to the street before the hole was closed again. No one bothered much about prisoners, there were so many of them. For example, one prisoner reported that 50 German soldiers were waiting patiently in an air raid

shelter to give themselves up—safely. The 2nd Battalion's S-2, Lt. Bruce M. Hutton, a sergeant, and a driver drove out to the shelter and herded them back.

The 333rd's Company G captured Hannover's police and fire departments with some ceremony. At the outskirts of the city, the company was amazed to find 50 policemen all lined up. The German police officer in charge stepped forward, smartly saluted Lt. Max Rettig, the company's forward artillery observer, collected his men's arms, and turned them over. In the middle of Hannover, the fire department force was also lined up and turned in all their weapons. Their leader preferred to give the Nazi salute, which was not appreciated.

The only opposition encountered by the 335th's 2nd Battalion was offered by two Mark III tanks. They came down a side street and fired at a Company E detachment sent to seize a bridge across the Leine River. Our tanks and bazooka men immediately went after them but they scrambled away. Otherwise, as elsewhere, the chief problems were getting through the rubble, because Hannover was a wreck, and restoring order in the streets, because the foreign laborers, in revenge for their years of oppression, staged some wild scenes in front of warehouses and stores in search of food. There was too much liquor.

Probably the most stubborn resistance on April 10 was not in Hannover but in the little village of Northen, about 6 miles west of Hannover (Map 16). In the morning, the Artillery S-3, Lt. Col. David E. Jones, was killed by a sniper. General Barrett ordered a battery of 155 mm. guns into position for direct fire into the place. The big guns ripped it apart. The 335th's Company I, following closely behind the artillery, entered the town at 8:30 p.m. Inside the town, some small arms were encountered, but the artillery had very effectively wiped out the main resistance. It was discovered that the Northen pocket was fairly large, as such pockets went in this phase. Even after shelling, about 130 prisoners were collected.

By the afternoon of April 10, the capture of Hannover was newspaper copy. "American troops captured Hannover today in an armored sweep that caved in Germany's northern and central defenses and rolled forward at a mile-an-hour clip 115 to 120 miles from the Nazi capital," the United Press reported. "Two doughboy regiments of the U.S. 9th Army's 84th Division stormed into Hannover from the northwest and southwest early this morning. By midday, they had reached the center of the flaming stronghold that once was the twelfth city of Germany." *The News*, Washington, D.C., brought out its largest type for that afternoon's front page: "84th Infantry

Takes Hannover." The Associated Press pointed out that Hannover was "the meeting place of five railroads and seven major highways." There were dozens of good stories in Hannover and the American press was full of them for the next 24 hours.

Life in Hannover

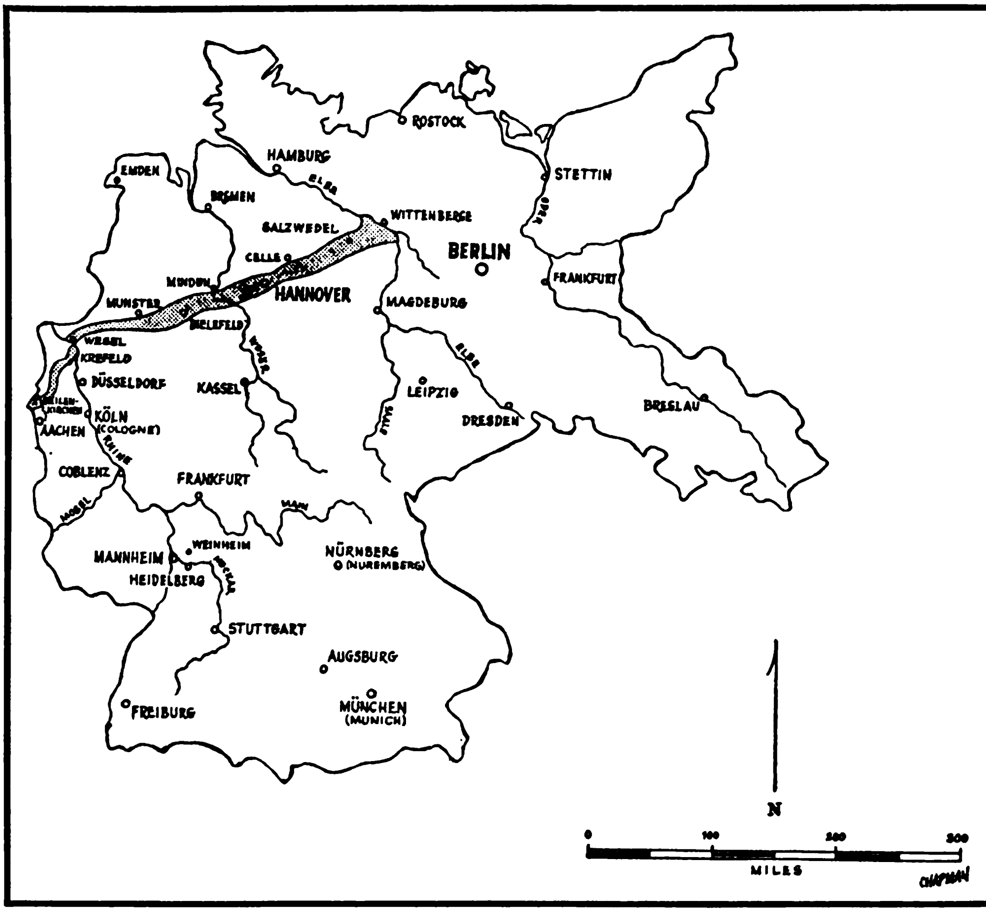
It is interesting to take stock briefly of the nonmilitary situation in Hannover because civilian problems began more and more to force themselves on our attention. The chief immediate problems were political, economic, and social. From a normal population of more than about 475,000, Hannover was down to about 250,000 Germans, and 50-60,000 "displaced persons," about half westerners, including 10,000 to 20,000 Allied prisoners of war. The city was 60 to 70 per cent destroyed by concentrated doses of Allied saturation bombing. The main part of Hannover was almost flat and only the outlying districts were somewhat spared. The chief public health officer said that a marked increase in nervous disorders, malnutrition, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis was noticeable among German civilians and even more so among foreign workers. A typhus epidemic in the area was dangerous. None of the four water sources was functioning as a result of bomb damage.

Our Military Government unit was greeted by a complete city administration, except for the police chief who was too notorious a Nazi to take any chances. The oberburgermeister, Egon Budenner, a faithful Nazi, was completely familiar with what was expected of him because he had been German Military Governor in Belgrade and in France. In 1944, he had been appointed oberburgermeister of Hannover, but told us he was only too willing to work for us. He was kept in office for seven hours to provide enough information to carry on without him. To his dismay, he was then turned over to our counterintelligence unit and arrested.

Hannover was also the scene of some interesting counterintelligence work. Our C.I.C. tracked down two groups of Gestapo agents left behind by the German secret police to organize an underground movement as soon as Hannover was captured. Four days before the town fell, SS Obersturmbannfuhrer (Lt. Col.) Rentsch, Gestapo chief of Hannover, called a meeting of seven trusted agents and instructed them to operate in small groups, generally three men in each. Their job was to poison German public opinion against the Allies, to stimulate organized resistance, and, whenever pos-

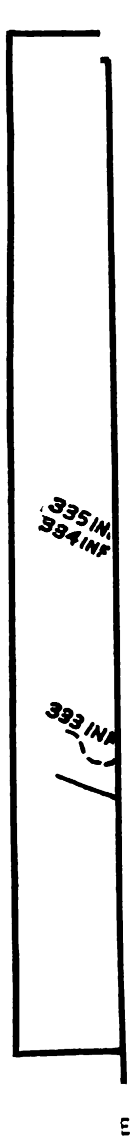
sible, to commit sabotage. A number of these Gestapo men, however, lost their nerve as soon as they were left on their own.

That very first afternoon, three representatives of a Social-Democratic underground movement against the Nazis came to offer their services. One had been police chief, one head of the labor bureau, and the third head of



15. FROM THE SIEGFRIED LINE TO THE ELBE

the post office until 1933. They were told to return the next morning with their candidate for burgermeister. Meanwhile, their stories were checked and found trustworthy. Their choice, a man of 67, had been burgermeister of a neighboring town and president of the Provincial Diet of Hannover until ousted by Hitler in 1934. In addition, he had spent 60 days in a Nazi prison. Though an old man, he was willing to take on the responsibility



temporarily and was appointed oberburgermeister. The other three were used as his aides. This was only the first step because a British Military Government unit took over the control of Hannover as we moved on.

It was noted that Hannover was a dividing line in terms of German sentiment toward American forces. Roughly, west of Hannover the attitude had been relatively co-operative. Along the Rhine, the white flags were plentiful and people quite freely expressed themselves against the Nazi regime, although it was always difficult to judge the sincerity of these sentiments. East of Hannover, however, the change was marked. White flags were scarce and more people in conversation identified themselves with the Nazi regime. For this there probably were several reasons. The war had not touched the country to the east as much as it had the Rhinelanders who suffered from the most severe bombardments—the more the suffering, the less sympathy for the Hitler regime. From Hannover to the Elbe, the region was mainly agricultural, lacking either a strong aristocracy or a strong working class. The middle class in this zone was half shopkeeper, half farmer, precisely the social group that was most vulnerable to Nazi propaganda. To some extent, the predominantly Catholic character of the Rhineland also tended to work against the Nazi campaign to destroy the influence of the churches.

Across the Aller

From Hannover to the Elbe, the drive was steady, rapid, and, except for a few incidents, unsensational. Only two combat teams, the 333rd and 334th, were involved because the 335th Infantry was left in Hannover as XIII Corps reserve. The 333rd pushed forward on the left flank, the 334th on the right flank.

In the next two days, April 11-12, both teams advanced about 25 miles. On April 11, the 333rd went as far as Gross Burgwedel and Klein Burgwedel, about 8 miles northeast of Hannover (Map 16). The main problems were the masses of German soldiers who gave themselves up and the crowds of forced laborers and German civilians who decided on their own initiative to redistribute property on a small scale. The 334th went as far as Burgdorf, somewhat further east, without any difficulty. At one point, the 1st Battalion ran into some old anti-aircraft guns, manned by boys of 14 and 15, who made no attempt to fire them. At another, the 3rd Battalion found 25 German vehicles, including four-wheel trailers, moving vans,

trucks, and buses, loaded with ammunition, clothing, soldiers' packs, and other equipment. Apparently the convoy had run out of gas and the vehicles had been abandoned.

More fighting, more blown bridges, and more bad roads were encountered on April 12 but another 20 miles was covered despite them. The 333rd had to stay on secondary roads to get as far as Nordburg that night. A large oil-producing field was overrun and a big ammunition dump was captured. At the Aller Canal, however, some units engaged in the heaviest fighting since the Weser crossing.

The 333rd's 1st Battalion was able to get a bridge across the canal intact. A Company C rifleman killed a German engineer with one shot. He was about to detonate 3000 pounds of explosive. Nordburg, a little village on the other side of the canal, was full of snipers. Tank destroyers crossed the bridge first, followed by infantry. The TD's drove down the main street, their guns blowing down the center. The infantry mopped up with small arms and grenades.

The 333rd's 3rd Battalion, however, had to wade across and fight one of the fiercest actions in the drive to establish a bridgehead. At about 2 p.m., Company I scouts, edging cautiously through the deserted streets of Weinhausen, on the west bank of the canal, caught sight of an intact bridge. An enemy half-track nosed out onto the bridge, was fired on, beat it back. A few moments later, a German soldier rode out on the bridge on a bicycle, waved a white handkerchief, and motioned Company I into Opperhausen, on the east bank of the canal.

Company I's commander, Capt. James M. Bradford, suspected that the bridge was mined and that the enemy was trying to get as many of his men as possible on the bridge before blowing it. He ordered his company to stay in Weinhausen. The German jumped off the bicycle and started to run back into Oppershausen. A rifleman cut him down. The Germans in Oppershausen fired back but, when they saw that no one was going to cross the bridge, set off the charges. It was a fine job, Company I men admitted. The bridge was demolished.

A heavy machine gun section was moved up to spray the German positions. Under the cover of this fire, two squads of the 1st Platoon were sent across the canal, which was about 20 yards wide. Three men were hit in the crossing. The others entered the town from two sides. The Germans fought back with bazookas and grenades. The enemy force was made up of about 90 Luftwaffe and Hitler Youth soldiers, led by SS troops. They were determined to defend Oppershausen house by house and did.

After the remainder of Company I crossed, artillery was called down on the town. It was very accurate; a good deal of white phosphorus came down within 100 yards of our own men. When the barrage lifted, Company I swept into the streets. The main part was cleared but snipers held out in some houses on the eastern edge. Five mortars were set up and concentrated on those houses. Then the infantry mopped up. Company L followed behind Company I and put the finishing touches on the job. It was midnight before all firing had died down. That night the town was bedlam. German civilians ran around wildly trying to put out fires as our men searched the burning houses for hideouts.

The 334th was held up by blown bridges more than by anything else. The 1st Battalion went 10 miles before it was held up at Wathlingen by anti-tank and rifle fire. The 1st Battalion had the 1st Platoon tanks of the 771st's Company B along and they cleared the way. Just as the battalion was leaving the town at about noon, the bridge to the north across the Fuhse River, a tributary of the Aller, was blown. The column was delayed four and a half hours until the engineers could throw another one across. While waiting, Company A dismounted and cleared a number of villages on the other side of the Fuhse on foot. By 4:30 p.m., the column was ready to drive forward again and went as far as Müden, another 10 miles, where the bridge situation was much luckier. At Müden, there were six bridges across the Aller, with four aerial bombs mined in each. Retreating German soldiers had ordered the local civilians to blow the bridges. Instead the civilians warned the 1st Battalion and engineers removed the mines. The battalion advanced another 3 miles to Ettenbuttel and settled for the night.

The 334th's 2nd Battalion reported a similar incident near Müden. It came to a bridge south of the town which had six 500-pound American aerial bombs, nose down, beneath the bridge and hooked up with TNT for detonation. Civilians revealed that two SS soldiers had been ordered to blow the bridge but they, together with an SS unit in the town, had cleared out 15 minutes before our arrival. As for the 334th's 3rd Battalion, it was held up at Langlingen on the west bank of the Aller by a blown bridge.

The First Counterattack

April 13 was a Friday. At the "front," progress was steady, interrupted only by incidents that were frequently more amusing or amazing than they were threatening.

The 333rd went as far as Wittengen, less than 50 miles from the Elbe. The population of Wittengen was unusually hostile and the 1st Battalion had to deal with a number of civilians shielding German troops. The battalion's executive officer, Major George A. Dunavant, went into one house which looked like a fine command post. He asked the woman in it if any German soldiers were there. She replied no. In the front room, a German lieutenant and sergeant turned up. The lieutenant reached for his pistol. He was dead before he could get at it. The 2nd Battalion pulled into Ohrdorf, about 4 miles east of Wittengen, later that night. In order to get billets the men had to yank German soldiers out of bed. At midnight, an American sentry on his rounds was surprised to see a German sentry carefully guarding the rear of the battalion CP. The latter was duly notified that he was relieved and marched off to a PW cage.

In the southern zone, the 334th's 1st Battalion went as far as Schneflingen, about 6 miles southeast of Wittengen. There the 1st Battalion was attached to the 5th Armored, which was out ahead of the 84th, to make the Elbe crossing, if and when it was ordered to do so. The crossing was expected in the vicinity of Havelberg on the night of April 14, but plans were canceled that afternoon. The 2nd Battalion went as far as Gladdenstedt, about 4 miles east of Schneflingen.

The 334th's 3rd Battalion, however, had to go back a bit before it could move forward again. Held up by the blown bridge at Langlingen, it backtracked about 3 miles to Offensen in order to cross the Aller River by a new route. At Offensen, the column had to cross the Muhlen Canal but it was held up by another blown bridge. As a result of this delay, the 3rd Battalion found itself in a fight which was probably connected with something much larger—the first German counterattack in the 84th's drive from the Rhine to the Elbe.

While the engineers were working on the bridge over the Muhlen Canal, the 334th's 3rd Battalion sent a patrol into the woods to the south. Enemy self-propelled artillery and small arms opened up on the patrol as it entered the woods. Company K was sent in to clean out the pocket which consisted of an estimated force of 6 tanks, 8 half-tracks, and about 100 infantrymen. Before Company K could get near enough to attack, this force drove off.

A short time later, it was heard from again, this time more seriously. As the story was reconstructed, this is what happened:

The German Army had a peculiar custom. Instead of sending equipment to men, it sent men after equipment. A battalion of the 5th SS "Viking"

Panzer Division, committed on the eastern front, had to be refitted and was sent to Munster just as the city was surrounded. It was briefly committed as infantry and we took a number of prisoners who enabled us to make a tentative identification of the unit. But the men we took were stragglers. The main body withdrew and made its way to Hannover where it managed to pick up some tanks. The 84th did not run into it again at Hannover because it pulled out to the southeast. Soon after, however, the battalion made its way to the northeast. On April 13, it struck twice. The first time was early in the morning at the 334th's 3rd Battalion. The second time was late in the morning at the tail end of the 333rd's column.

Our 325th Field Artillery Battalion was attached to the 333rd Combat Team. That morning, it was moving from Weinhausen, where the 333rd's 3rd Battalion had fought so fiercely the day before to cross the Aller River, to catch up with the rest of the 333rd. At 11 a.m., as the Service Battery was leaving Weinhausen, a force of 5 heavy enemy tanks and at least 10 armored vehicles crashed in and destroyed three 2½-ton trucks, one ¼-ton vehicle, and one M-10 trailer. Miraculously, no one was hurt. The head of the column was about 3500 yards east of Weinhausen when the warning of the attack was flashed by radio. The column stopped, turned around, and rushed back to the scene of the attack. Battery A was quickly placed to defend the eastern approaches to Weinhausen, Battery C the southern approaches, Battery B the western approaches. Battery B, 557th AAA Battalion, joined in the ground defense and later drove off enemy automatic and rifle fire from the woods north and south of the town. At the same time the 333rd's 3rd Battalion and a platoon of tank destroyers were sent back to clean out the pocket and still later the 334th's 3rd Battalion was added.

By 1 p.m. Weinhausen was securely held again and the 325th FA Battalion, except for its Battery A, moved out to keep up with the rest of the combat team. Battery A was left in Weinhausen to support the two infantry battalions that were sent back to clean out the pocket. Both battalions swept the woods south and southeast of Weinhausen but found no trace of the enemy raiders. Nevertheless, that was not the last of them for us.

Elbe, Here We Come

By April 14, so much of the division was detached to other organizations for one reason or another that only five battalions were left to the 84th to continue the drive to the Elbe. But they were enough. Each infantry bat-

talion was the core of a little task force that took separate routes to the river to flush out the division's zone.

That day, all five teams drove virtually within sight of the Elbe. For the 333rd, the 1st Battalion landed in Pollitz, less than 3 miles from the river, the 2nd Battalion in Harpe, about 7 miles away, and the 3rd Battalion in Lindenberg, about the same distance. On the way, the 2nd Battalion picked up a battalion of about 250 German soldiers, between the ages of 11 and 15. They were lined up on the street of a small village, Lindhof, about 40 miles east of the Elbe, their leader blew a whistle, the boys dashed to their homes to get their packs, and lined up again to march off to captivity. The most interesting work of the 333rd, however, was not so much in taking German prisoners, who were so numerous that by this time they were more of a nuisance than anything else, as in liberating Allied war prisoners.

The 333rd's 1st Battalion went through the town of Salzwedel, about 25 miles from the Elbe, at noon. On the eastern edge of Salzwedel was a filthy concentration camp for 3000 women, 2700 Jewish women from eastern Europe and 300 non-Jewish political prisoners from western Europe. On the western edge, there was another camp for French war prisoners. Inside the town, a mass of Allied war prisoners began to congregate, including 1149 Americans and 241 British, Canadians, and Australians. Among the Americans were 1st Infantry Division men taken at Kasserine Pass, Rangers from Anzio, 82nd Airborne Division men from Sicily, and 106th Infantry Division men from the Ardennes. The British soldiers went as far back as Dunkerque and the Dieppe raid. All of them had been interned in Poland and had been forced to march more than 500 miles on foot in the past two to three weeks.

As our troops had approached, we learned, the American prisoners were ordered to prepare to move back to Berlin immediately. The American spokesman refused to obey the order. A German captain, armed with hand grenades, came out and threatened to throw them into their midst if they did not start marching. They refused again. The German lost his nerve and threw his grenades into a near-by pasture. Then he marched his own men down the road and the Allied prisoners took possession of Salzwedel.

As for the liberation of the women's camp, it is best to tell the story in the words of one of the French political prisoners, Mme. Lou Peters, who spoke excellent English:

"We didn't know anything about the Americans being nearby. We couldn't get into the town at all. The wire around the camp was charged

with electricity. The first we knew that anything was about to happen was three days before the Americans came, April 11. That day the French prisoners of war were freed. Not freed, exactly. Their guards just left and there was nobody to hold them. They found a truckload of food and came around to the camp to give it to us. The German commander let them bring the food in and later he told us that we would be freed when the Americans came. He did not let us out at the time and the guards continued to watch us."

Mme. Peters continued: "Then on the 14th we began to hear the noise of tanks and we began to watch for the Americans. We thought there would be a grand entrance with columns of tanks and cars. When nothing showed up at the camp, we began to get anxious. At about noon, the Americans came. Two enlisted men came up to the front gate. They were combat troops and I suppose they did not know quite what to do. The German guards all put their hands up—they were outside the gate with the camp's commander. The girls were all inside, milling around and shouting, trying to get near the gate. The whole camp personnel was there except for the chef in the kitchen."

Mme. Peters hesitated a moment. "All of a sudden the chef came out of a rear entrance and started to run for the woods. One of the Americans raised his gun and fired one shot. It was a beautiful shot. It went through the chef's head. It was the most beautiful shot we had ever seen. The girls were wild and they finally broke open the gate. They surrounded the Americans and tried to hug and kiss them. They were just crazy with joy. The boys didn't know what to make of it and they were startled and, I guess, maybe a little annoyed. They shouted, 'Go on, you're free! Take off!' And the girls still tried to get at them. The boys shouted: 'Do anything you want but get out of here!' They motioned the girls to keep away because they wanted to get at the German commander and his staff."

The advance of the 334th to the vicinity of the Elbe was less eventful but one incident was significant. The 2nd Battalion went as far as Krevese, about 10 miles from the Elbe, and the 3rd Battalion to Losse, about 7 miles away. En route, at Gross Apenburg, it was noticed that white flags were entirely absent. It turned out that the 5th Armored had passed through the town previously and was greeted by the usual array of bed covers, handkerchiefs, towels, and underwear. When the 5th Armored left, two German soldiers slipped into town with the story that Hitler had 5000 tanks in Berlin which were ready to drive westward to crush the Americans. The white

flags vanished. When the 2nd Battalion came in, the townspeople decided that Hitler's 5000 tanks might be late in saving Gross Apenburg for the Third Reich and the white things were given another airing.

On April 14, there was evidence of further unrest in the rear areas. At about 1:30 p.m., 40 miles behind Salzwedel, in the town of Hohne, four enemy self-propelled guns and some infantry were engaged by tanks of our 771st Tank Battalion. Three enemy guns were knocked out and the other fled into the heavy woods to the southeast. Also during the day a large concentration of enemy troops was reported north of Stockheim in the Salzwedel area. A platoon of the 84th Reconnaissance Troop was sent to investigate. North of Rohrberg, they found a road block which was speedily reduced. This report was typical of several grossly exaggerated rumors but serious enough to prevent us from taking anything for granted.

There were enemy forces inside the very large areas that our columns had streaked through that day—about 40 miles were covered on the 14th—but they were raiders who operated to a large extent on their nerve. The 771st's Company B sent a truck back to the rear to pick up a load of gasoline. After a number of misadventures, the truck joined a four-truck convoy of the 325th Field Artillery. In the thick dust and numerous curves of the dirt road, the tanker's truck fell behind. A shot rang out in front of it. Three soldiers inside hit the ditch. A dozen Germans, hidden in the woods alongside the road, had been watching the convoy and had decided to grab the last truck. They were starving for gasoline themselves. When the three truckers were captured, they were taken into the woods where they saw three enemy self-propelled guns and a personnel carrier. Like most of the raiders in this phase, this group was SS.

A number of things impressed our men about the raiding party. "Boy! That SS captain was dressed fit to kill!" Pvt. William M. Pemberton said. "Black, shiny boots, lots of gold braid, monocle in his eye, high-brimmed hat and all. He had a large surgical patch over his right eye which you could see he didn't need but he kept it there for effect."

But Pvt. Pemberton added: "Those guys were plenty scared. They were most afraid of our tanks. I'd say it was 20 times I heard the lieutenant or captain holler 'panzer! panzer!' and with that they would all dive for cover. You could see the nervousness in the whole group. Another thing the Germans seemed to fear was our cub planes. They knew that the cubs would spot them and they always kept a man on the lookout for them. A third thing that seemed to worry the SS was fear of capture. They would keep on asking us, 'What do the Americans do with captured SS men?'

What did SS men talk about to their prisoners, at least in these final days of the war? Pvt. Pemberton had some interesting things to report: "Just before dark some of the group, maybe 45 in all, came to look us over. I was surprised at the number that could speak English. One big fellow liked to brag a lot and he boasted that not so long ago he had seen New York. When we looked surprised, he laughed and said it was through a submarine periscope. He then asked how many planes our top ace had shot down. We said about 35. He scoffed and said the top German ace had over 300 to his credit. We knew that was so much bull but we were in no position to argue the point."

There was a good deal of politics too. "This big fellow went on to talk about the death of President Roosevelt and wanted to know who was going to take his place. We told him Truman and he wanted to know if President Truman's grandfather was a German. He asked us what we thought of Hitler and the rest. He got mighty evasive answers to that one. Another of the group came out with, 'All Germany wanted was to get her colonies back in this war.' It was a good thing it was too dark to see our grins. Our guard, a 17-year-old kid, piped up, 'The Allies have ruined Germany. Our country hasn't got anything any more.' They must have all agreed to that statement because not one of them said anything. Then the big fellow asked us what we thought of the Russians and we said they were good soldiers. It was easy to see that they firmly agreed with that statement, also."

When dawn came, the Germans were ready to pull out because they were more worried about their own skins than about their prisoners. Although it was an old SS habit not to take prisoners, it was not a good habit to follow this time because the odds against them were so overwhelming. Our follow-up forces could be heard in the distance. As a result, the three truckers were freed "if they promised not to fight Germans any more."

April 14 was the last day of real advance because it brought us so close to the Elbe. The 5th Armored was now outposting the river in front of us and the next day, April 15, was spent in preparation to replace the 5th Armored in defensive positions along the Elbe.

On April 16, the 84th moved up to the Elbe. The division's left boundary included the town of Wahrenberg, the right boundary was northwest of Havelberg. The 334th Infantry took over the right half of this zone, the 333rd Infantry the left half. By 8 p.m., the 5th Armored was relieved.

It was not at the Elbe that the enemy was very noticeable as much as farther back. Since April 13, the rear areas had been bubbling with rumors and threats, some real and some imaginary, of enemy raiders. The reason for

this was significant. In these huge leaps of 20 to 40 miles a day, it was difficult for the follow-up units to maintain the same pace as the forward columns. Sometimes for hours, sometimes for as much as a day or two, a virtual vacuum might exist in between. A break-through is the most fluid type of warfare, often as fluid in the rear as at the front. In fact, the distinction almost tends to lose its importance.

On our northern flank, the situation was especially delicate because the 11th Cavalry Group, which was screening that flank, was not large enough to cover so vast an area. It was possible, therefore, for a determined enemy force to get through the screen and hit us in the rear from the north. On the morning of April 16, this happened.

One of the few identifiable, large German units, the von Clausewitz Division, was roaming in the relatively open spaces to the north of us. It began to probe southward on or about April 14 in an effort to find a way to the Harz Mountains which was considered a last stronghold of the German Army. After several brushes with the 11th Cavalry Group, the main body of the von Clausewitz Division came down about 10 miles west of Salzwedel. On the morning of April 16, when our rear echelon was moving up to Salzwedel, this enemy force struck two blows in rapid succession.

The situation was ironic. Our forward echelon was moving in comparative safety to the Elbe. Our rear echelon was moving in comparative danger 40 miles behind the Elbe. For a few days, it was much safer to go forward from Salzwedel than to go backward.

At 5:45 a.m., April 16, the rear echelon of the 557th AAA Battalion in the town of Jubar, about 15 miles southwest of Salzwedel, was attacked by an enemy force from the von Clausewitz Division. It consisted of approximately 100 vehicles and 750 men, including 15 tanks. The first warning of the attack came from guards who heard shots and grinding machines. Two minutes later, the enemy's tanks, from which all markings had been removed, drove into town. One tank stopped just in front of the building occupied by the 557th's rear echelon personnel and trained its gun on the entrance. Other tanks passed through the town blocking all roads and approaches. Some civilians helped the enemy, some our men. For example, 18 of our men, including 5 officers, escaped by hiding in the cellar of their building. When enemy troops came to search the building, civilians assured them there was no one there and they did not bother to go through it. Our men were later told by the civilians when the enemy troops had left. Nevertheless, in Jubar, a number of trucks and men were captured.

Later that morning, these enemy raiders struck again, this time at the

division's rear echelon which was moving from Hannover to Salzwedel. At about 11 a.m., as the second serial was leaving the town of Ehra, about 10 miles southwest of Jubar, machine guns, burp guns, and mortars opened up on the convoy. Mortar shells hit one truck with the personnel equipment and records of the 335th Infantry and another with ammunition. The men jumped off and dispersed in the ditches. They crawled back to Ehra and took cover in houses along the road. Armed with carbines and rifles, clerks of the 335th and 333rd's personnel sections and the division's finance section took up positions at the windows. Some were able to escape in two trucks that drove into town before the enemy launched the main attack but more than 100 were captured by the obviously overwhelming German force of tanks and half-tracks.

The Germans took away all the watches and trinkets, then brought their prisoners to the village of Boitzenhagen in the midst of a woods. The 557th men and some of the division's band were already there, besides more than 100 Russian and French forced laborers. The prison cage was an old stable. The rest of the afternoon was spent wondering what was going to happen next. What did happen was not in the books. The Germans knew that their end was near and their chief aim was to ingratiate themselves with their own prisoners. The 102nd Infantry Division was coming up fast and they knew it was only a matter of hours before the tables would be turned. As a result, by evening, the Germans were more interested in propaganda than in punishment. German officers and soldiers who knew enough English came over to "fraternize." They offered German cigarettes and brought a baseball and bat. A German doctor treated our wounded with the utmost consideration. At 10 p.m., the German commander announced that he intended to free the whole group but insisted that we had to guard the Russian laborers when his force pulled out. An hour later, a group of German civilians brought an enormous pot of potato soup with chopped livers. Only the Americans were fed.

At 3:30 a.m. the next morning, American artillery began to come in heavily. The Germans were moving out but their 88's answered. After an hour of shelling, it was quiet and our men, free at last, were able to get out. They found an abandoned truck on the road and came upon the 102nd in the next town. Everyone was back in his own unit that same day. It was not often that the rear echelon could tell the forward echelon what the war was *really* like but April 16 was one time.

CHAPTER XV

Another Journey's End

ONCE at the Elbe, the chief interest was not so much in our German enemies as in our Russian allies. The junction of all the Allied forces was only a matter of time, but after waiting so long for the great moment, it was somewhat of a strain to sit on the Elbe and do nothing about it. The honor of shaking hands with the first Russian soldier and drinking a toast of fiery vodka to celebrate the historic occasion was almost in our grasp—if only the Russian forces in our zone would hurry up and get to us first. Meanwhile, without orders to cross the Elbe, we had to watch the race of the Russian forces across Germany from a distance.

It was the consensus of informed opinion in the 84th that the Elbe would not have held us up if we had chosen to cross. Supply was not worrying us because we had enough gasoline to go past Berlin, enough food for four full days, and enough ammunition for a major attack. In case we were ordered to cross, we had made plans to have rations dropped by plane, though that would probably have been unnecessary. The Elbe was the most convenient place to meet the Red Army and the final decision was, of course, made by higher headquarters.

The Elbe was, however, a good place to take stock of the 250-mile drive from the Rhine. In such a fast moving front, it was easy to lose sight of the fact that a large measure of credit for the achievement belonged to the men in the "rear."

For example, tire maintenance was one of our worst problems. Due to shell fragments on the roads, the ration trains of the 84th Quartermaster Company averaged about 25 punctures per trip. Our drivers had to drive all day and fix tires all night. Those supply trips were not little jaunts, either. To haul an average of 120 tons of gas and 66 tons of rations daily, the shortest distance was a round trip of 200 miles, the longest closer to 350. Clothing had to move as much as 650 miles. Only ammunition was relatively

near, a round trip of only 100 miles. We had to evacuate about 300 truck-loads of prisoners, averaging a round trip of 150 miles. Throughout the drive, every truck in our 84th Quartermaster Company made over 200 miles daily. In the opinion of our G-4, Lt. Col. James A. Channon, our supply problems in order of priority were: gasoline, evacuation of prisoners, rations, and ammunition.

Communications were another factor which might have caused us some concern. Because the distances were so great, radio was used almost exclusively and a certain relaxation in security regulations was necessary. Wire was usually laid by the 84th Signal Company from the division command post to any important unit in the immediate vicinity but otherwise radio was the only method in use. Only once was a relatively long wire used—on the night before the Weser crossing, from the division to the 335th Infantry and Division Artillery, but the assistant signal officer, Major Runnell B. Ellis, spent most of the night in a halfway post acting as a human repeater relaying all calls.

Our signal men did not hesitate to use German equipment whenever possible. Several German switchboards and a number of field telephones, which did not prove as satisfactory as American equipment but helped out greatly, were pressed into service. At one time, of 178 miles of wire in use, 150 miles were open or German commercial wire. One signal team "captured" three towns before one man, who knew some French, spoke to a French laborer and found that no Americans had been in them before. The team backed out and encountered a German half-track armed with machine guns which were not manned at the time. On the way, it met the infantry mounted on tanks coming in. As the Signal Officer, Lt. Col. Winfred A. Ross, put it, "the signal setup on the dash through Germany was unusual but it was no more unusual than the drive as a whole and it worked out just as well."

Many problems were solved by the very momentum of the attack. "When I rode back and looked at the culverts and bridges which had not been blown," General Bolling remarked, "I realize that we could have been held up at least two weeks by these obstacles alone." Colonel Charles E. Hoy added:

"The theory of by-passing resistance worked very well. In some cases, this forced troops in the rear to conduct difficult and dangerous mopping up operations but, by and large, when garrisons were by-passed and cut off, the fight went out of the German troops. When they were attacked directly,

they sometimes fought quite well. When they were surrounded, they usually surrendered. This is one reason for the surprisingly low number of casualties suffered by the Americans."

The amazing difference in the type of resistance put up by the German troops in these last days was one of the most striking features of the campaign. For the most part, the German Army was obviously beaten. But, from time to time, a desperate little band was still determined to sell itself as dearly as possible. This was shown twice after April 16 while we were waiting for the Russians to come up. In the very final hours of the war, some of the fiercest fighting in the campaign suddenly whipped up. Some men who had gone through the accumulated danger and misery of the Siegfried Line, the Ardennes, and the long slash from the Roer to the Elbe, were not able to live to see the day of victory.

The Last Miles

On April 18, the 84th's zone on the Elbe was enlarged to extend northward as far as the village of Pretzetze. It was necessary to clear the river line from Wahrenberg to Pretzetze, a distance of approximately 20 miles. The 335th's 1st Battalion was given the center and the 333rd's 3rd Battalion the right (Map 16).

At 6 a.m., April 21, this final operation, which seemed to amount to no more than a cleanup, was launched. On the right flank, the 333rd's 3rd Battalion met very little resistance and had gained the river line in its zone by 3 p.m. But the 335th's two battalions had to pay for their success.

The 335th's 1st Battalion started off easily but ended up by fighting one of the bloodiest actions of the war. At Trebel, about 5 miles from the Elbe, two Polish laborers pointed out all the enemy's defensive positions. Our tanks softened up the emplacements and the infantry mopped up. The next 2 miles, as far as Gedelitz, was steady pushing. Then, by 8 a.m., Companies A and B were ready to move on Gorleben, a little more than 2 miles away, a few yards from the river.

In Gorleben was an estimated force of 200 Germans. They had their backs to the river and yet fought back bitterly. Less than a mile from Gorleben, Company A began to receive scattered small arms fire, but the nearer it got the stronger the fire became. At noon, when Company B

reached the outskirts of the town, the last-ditch stand was still evident. Apparently some German troops were beginning to get out by crossing the Elbe in small boats and barges but some soldiers and civilians were left behind to cover the withdrawal and these held out. At noon, the final assault was launched, Company A in the eastern sector, Company B in the western. An hour later, the town was completely cleared but veterans had to admit that this particular enemy group fought more desperately in a hopeless cause in Gorleben than most of the German Army in our way had fought in much more hopeful circumstances for two months.

The 335th's 3rd Battalion finished its share of the operation by 3:10 p.m. The enemy put up a fight for Gartow, a village about 2 miles from the Elbe, behind road blocks and houses. Our troops were strafed by enemy planes on the south side of the town. Some resistance was also put up in the village of Kapern. A few more villages were cleaned out on April 22 and the job was finished. The 84th's river line was 40 miles long.

There was one more flurry of excitement the next day, April 23. Ironically, the fighting in the European war ended for us with a German counterattack. The enemy had established a straggler collecting point in two coves east of the village of Vietze. About 200 of these stragglers evidently decided to have a final fling. At 1:45 a.m. on the morning of April 23, Company I reported that the enemy was attacking Pevestorf with automatic weapons, rifles, and panzerfausts. All but one platoon of Company I had to withdraw to reorganize.

Reinforced by a platoon of tanks and a platoon of Company K, Company I struck back. The enemy force was met again at Restorf, 1½ miles south of Pevestorf, and driven out. Pevestorf was also freed by 10 a.m. and Company I's platoon, which had been cooped up in a single house, was relieved. The surrounding country was cleared during the day.

While we were wondering whether we would be permitted to cross the Elbe, the Red Cross acted. A German civilian came over with a message that American prisoners of war in Havelberg, on the east bank, needed medical supplies, food, and cigarettes. On April 29, one of our Red Cross directors, Mr. Robert A. Redus, attached to the 335th Infantry, loaded a jeep, stuck a white flag on it, and crossed over. The jeep was stopped at the outskirts of Havelberg but its mission was respected. The Americans were 102nd Infantry Division soldiers, captured during the fighting in the Siegfried Line.

Life in Salzwedel

The transition to occupational work was begun while we were waiting for the Red Army and the daily pressure of combat had eased up. Although the 84th did not stay in any one place long enough to engage in long-range activities, the basic groundwork was always laid because it was recognized that the fruits of our victory would largely depend on the success of our occupation.

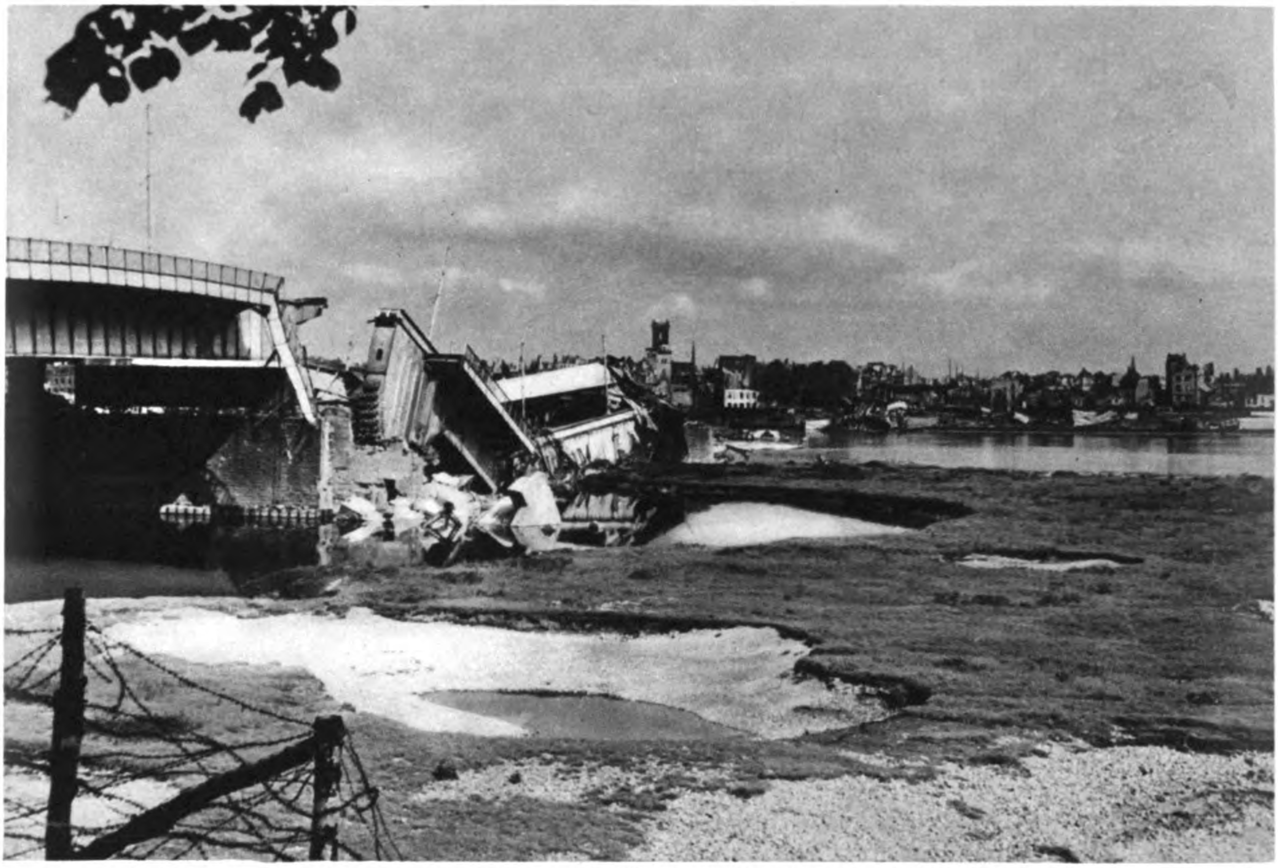
Perhaps the single most interesting experiment was the "rehabilitation" of the 3000 women found in the Salzwedel "work camp." Many of them had come from the "extermination camp" at Oswiecim (Auschwitz), Poland, and their sufferings had left deep marks. In Salzwedel, these women had worked in 12-hour shifts in the local munitions factory making shell casings for small arms. Although the Salzwedel camp was not fit for human beings and the labor was heartless, it was relatively mild, as such things went in Nazi Germany. As one girl said, "There were no gas chambers, no dogs, not even too many beatings. We thought it must be a sanitarium."

The first step in their recovery was the transfer of the women from their original camp to new, modern houses of the Adolf Hitler Barracks which had formerly held the personnel of a German airfield in the vicinity. General Bolling renamed it "Camp Vassar." The old camp was burned to the ground. One by one, the old, thin, foul prison barracks were burned down as the women, watching the scene from outside the wire, sobbed uncontrollably, almost unable to grasp the meaning of their strange, new freedom.

Food was a major problem. Since the SS had virtually starved them, the women were naturally apt to overeat once the famine was over. Nevertheless, they had to be put on a careful diet which included a good deal of liquids. Their stomachs had shrunk to such a point that most of them were unable to consume the normal amount of solids. It was necessary to explain that this treatment was temporary and for their own good.

"Those people were starving," Camp Vassar's S-3, Capt. Charles E. Willson, said. "After we set up our messes, they fought to get in line. Under the German system, thirty people were given food for ten and the ten who fought the hardest stayed alive. We told them that there was enough for all and that they could have seconds if they wanted. They wouldn't believe it. After a while, they began to settle down."

Camp Vassar was an experiment on a large scale which worked out remarkably well. In essence, it was an attempt to take 3000 women who had



THE enemy blew his own bridge over the Rhine at Wesel, but a crossing was made at this site anyway on a substitute.

THOUGH there was not much fighting for us from the Rhine to the Weser, the Weser crossing was more dangerous. An enemy mortar shell at Barkhausen, on the west bank of the Weser, called out the medics.





AN aerial view of the Weser crossing, the Weser Gebirge (Hills) in the background.

AFTER a surprise crossing of the Weser in assault boats, an infantry support bridge was built and the heavy stuff began to roll.





AT Hannover, enough German cars and busses were captured to motorize a whole regiment.

THE autobahn was a great help in the nonstop motorized advance to the Elbe.



ALWAYS the same sight, prisoners to the rear, jeeps forward. The luckier prisoners rode back but there were too many. Civilians lined the roads, searching for familiar faces.







THE best part of the drive to the Elbe was the liberation of American PW's (above), many of them captured in the Ardennes, and Allied PW's in general, who immediately began to walk home (below). The men on the left (above) were telling their stories to representatives of the 84th's newspaper, *The Railsplitter.*





THE most horrible part of the drive was the liberation of one of the worst concentration camps at Ahlem, a few miles west of Hannover. Conditions were so frightful that battle-hardened soldiers sickened at the sights. All the victims were Jewish. Few were left.





THE ghost of a great city: Hannover. It was the twelfth largest in Germany.



IN one part of Salzwedel, a released American PW celebrated with some liberated DP's.

IN another part of Salzwedel, two former American PW's inspected the collection of whips used by Nazi guards in a concentration camp. In this camp were 2700 Jewish women from eastern Europe and 300 non-Jewish women, political prisoners from western Europe.





THE miserable camp in Salzwedel was burned down and the women were transferred to the excellent Adolf Hitler Barracks which had housed the personnel of a Luftwaffe field. For the first time in years, they ate like human beings. The band played for them. In return, the women handed out drinks and flowers.





AT the Elbe, hordes of German soldiers and officers, driven westward by the Russian advance, waited anxiously to cross over. Some succeeded. Most failed.





COLONEL VON WITZLEBEN (extreme right) did not forget to bring his "field wife," as his men called her (above). Those who managed to cross the Elbe began the long trek to the rear (below).





THE last great drama of the war was the link-up with the Red Army. A Russian reconnaissance patrol drove up to the Elbe ahead of the main column. Major General Bolling, the division commander (saluting), and Colonel Truman, chief of staff (behind him), greeted them personally.





AFTER the link-up, celebrations were the order of the day. General Bolling and the commander of the Russian 6th Cavalry Division reviewed troops in Salzwedel (above). At a reception at the headquarters of the Russian 23rd Infantry Division (below), left to right: Brigadier General Church, Lt. Colonel Gomes, a Russian regimental commander, the Russian division commander, Major General Bolling, and another Russian regimental commander.





MORE Elbe scenes: Russian DP's about to take a ferry over to the Russian side (above); a convoy of German hospital ships which anchored in our sector (below).





WE haven't the slightest idea how she got there, what they were laughing at, or where she went next. We merely know that it happened at a U.S.O. show near the Elbe and tells as much as any picture can that the war was over.



MAJOR GENERAL A. C. GILLEM, JR., commander of the XIII Corps, and Major General Bolling at a farewell party.

been forced to live horrible and unnatural lives and to lead them back to a more decent and normal existence. Yet, the Nazis had left scars on them which could not be healed in a week or a month.

When it was all over, one woman said: "I'm supposed to go back to Paris. I was supposed to go yesterday, but the train did not come. Then it was supposed to be today but I do not think it will be today. It may be tomorrow or next week. At first I was crazy to go home but now I am not so crazy. I do not know whether my husband is dead or alive and I do not know where my friends are. They say it is very expensive to live in France now and I have no money. I think I am afraid to go back because of what I may find. No, I do not know whether I want to go back or not. But, of course, I will go."

Salzwedel was also a good example of occupation problems in the very first phase after the cessation of hostilities. In general, the main problems were administrative and economic. It was necessary to set up a local administration in which the Nazi elements were eliminated and to re-establish a minimum standard of living. Administratively, the first job was to establish public order by appointing a burgermeister who in turn appointed a police force, subject to investigation by the C.I.C. About 350 burgermeisters had to be appointed in the Salzwedel area, most of them in small, farming communities. In some cases, mainly in the large towns, the Nazi burgermeister had fled and it was necessary to choose an entirely new man. In other cases, the burgermeister had been left behind by the Nazis and had to be investigated. In still others, in about three-fourths of the smallest villages, the burgermeister was acceptable.

The procedure in Salzwedel may be considered typical of the experience in the bigger towns. The new burgermeister had been chief clerk in the old administration but was recommended by the Catholic priest. On the day he was appointed, he called a meeting of all the leaders of the pre-1933 parties and obtained their co-operation. He formed a council of ten to help him and appointed a force of civilian policemen. The most pressing immediate problems were to obtain food and clothing for the "displaced persons" and Allied PW's in town, to remove German soldiers from some hospitals to make way for Allied soldiers, to provide billets, to clean up an old Jewish cemetery, and to supply details of German workers to clean up the camps. On the whole, the new administration worked co-operatively. The laundry was ordered to take care of the needs of the local military hospital. A furniture factory was converted to produce double-deck beds for the DP-PW camps. The main shortages were soap and coal, the latter so serious that it

threatened to close bakeries and power plants. In general, a barter system was instituted whereby a town or area with too much of one commodity would trade it for something else in another town or area.

Joe and Ivan

After May 1, the junction was imminent. The regiments painted great signs of greeting in Russian. An order forbidding all firing across the river was issued to prevent any possibility of hitting the wrong soldiers—but it was temporarily canceled as soon as German soldiers on the opposite shore began to sun-bathe. The sky was eagerly searched for flares to signal the approach of Russian units. By noon, May 2, German prisoners reported that Russian tank spearheads were only 2 or 3 miles from the river and Russian artillery fire was plainly heard all that morning.

It was easy to tell that the Russians were coming closer and closer by the number of prisoners we took. East of the Elbe, hordes of German soldiers and civilians, in every stage of organization and disorganization, were streaming toward the river and frantically trying to get across. As the Red Army neared, this mass flight became the last sign of life of the German Army. Men and women flung themselves into the swift current, many of them unsuccessfully, seeking some way across. One German Major General, Rudolph Holste, swam across with his wife and daughter. Once large-scale desertion of the sinking ship began, little restraint or even dignity was evident.

The confusion of the last few days and the state of mind of some German commanders may be seen in the surrender attempts of two generals. On May 2, Major General Otto Fruhner, commanding general of Division Fruhner, agreed to surrender the 4000 men of his division. He loaded his men and equipment on 250 barges and planned to proceed down the Havel River to the Elbe. But the barges were intercepted by the hard-driving Russian forces and never reached their destination. Lieutenant General Hellwig Luz, commanding general of the 199th Infantry Division, had a different problem. His division was still some distance from the Elbe and was held up by other German units ahead of it. General Luz came around to ask us to give his troops priority over other German soldiers on the other side of the river to enable them to push their way through before the Russians arrived. It had to be painfully explained to him that we could not control the situation on the other side and that we had no intention of interfering

in the slightest with Russian dispositions there. On May 2, a total of 15,954 German soldiers ferried and swam over to our shore.

Finally, at 4:30 p.m., May 2, the historic junction was made in our sector. A 10-man patrol, led by Lt. William M. Blair, of Company G, 333rd Infantry, made contact with a mobile group of the 89th Soviet Army Corps, commanded by Major General Siazov, near the town of Bälow. In an open field near Bälow, Lt. Blair shook hands with Senior Lt. Kovobachkin who greeted him in English: "Am I glad to see you! I've been waiting for this for four years." Lt. Kovobachkin, it developed, was a graduate of the College of the City of New York. The Russian soldiers escorted our patrol to a house in Bälow where an elegant meal, including the inevitable vodka, was served. More toasts were offered than the survivors were able to count.

Later that same evening, General Bolling met several Russian officers on the east bank of the Elbe and arrangements were made for a formal ceremony. The scene was sheer melodrama. Several thousand German soldiers, still waiting to cross the Elbe, were the audience. Almost surrounding the little party of Americans and Russians, the Germans glared at the final act which was deciding their fate because most of them were no longer able to cross. Sgt. Maurice Miller, who photographed the scene, said:

"I heard a lot of noise. Looking up, I saw a reconnaissance car drive up. A Russian bounded out of it as the car came to a stop. As he leaped to the ground, two rounds went off, harmlessly hitting the side of the car. It was a daredevil gesture. Then everyone shook hands. Everyone stood around looking each other over, touching rifles, and saying things nobody else understood. A Russian tank lieutenant apologized: 'Excuse me for my appearance. I'm very dirty.'"

For the next two weeks, every variety of "junction" was made, not only on a division level, but among regiments, battalions, and even companies. There were six Russian divisions opposite us, three from the 3rd Cossack Corps—32nd Cossack Division and the 5th and 6th Guard Divisions—and three from the 89th Army Corps—23rd, 311th, and 397th Divisions. On the afternoon of May 3, General Bolling and the 84th's staff exchanged formal greetings at the headquarters of the 23rd Russian Infantry Division at Bad Wilsnack. On the following afternoon, the Commanding General of the 32nd "Smolensk" Cossack Cavalry Division visited the 84th's headquarters at Priemern. All these visits were returned on both sides and a spirit of friendship, greater understanding, and mutual respect was perhaps the most important achievement. In the course of these ceremonies, approximately 60 decorations were exchanged on both sides.

V-E Day

By May 3, the only "units in contact" on our front were Russian forces. Prisoners continued to drift into our area and were picked up by road blocks and roving patrols. By May 8, the last day a count was made, the total number of prisoners for the Rhine-Elbe operation as a whole was 62,342. The total number for almost six months of combat was 70,109.

V-E Day itself was quietly observed. It was impossible as yet to see that the war in the east would end so soon after the war in the west. The thought that the job was only half done was sobering. When the war ended the folks back home could get out the ticker tape and the bottles, but the soldiers who had just finished fighting in a foreign land could not work up the same unrestrained joy. It was rather a time to think of home and to talk of home but the thoughts and the talk were all the more poignant because they had taken on a much greater realism. When home was very far away and the prospect of getting back in one piece was not too good, it was easy to be stoical and hard. It was much more tantalizing to wait, knowing that one day the great moment would come but, meanwhile, it was necessary to watch the days and weeks and perhaps months pass. For most men, there were two V-E days, May 8, the official date, and the very personal, private date of one man's homecoming.

Probably the most striking event on V-E Day was General Bolling's idea. The towns and villages in our sector were visited by Lt. Fritz Kraemer, of the G-2 section, who delivered a brief talk from a sound truck to the townspeople on the significance of the German surrender and the consequences which any further resistance might entail for the German people. On such a day, gathered in the town square to hear such a message, how did the German people react? Most listened quietly, almost rigidly. Some women sobbed. If an American soldier passed by, however, they quickly wiped away the tears. On the whole, their self-control was remarkable. Yet, it was possible to feel that in most towns the capitulation was a relief from the frightful tension and increasing misery of six long years. In some villages, it was also possible to feel that too many people had not learned enough or forgotten enough.

In this atmosphere of defeat and demoralization, it was not necessary to tell the American soldier that victory in war was not enough. It was not necessary to tell him that the peace was another struggle, which he had to win for his children. Because he had to pay for the last lost peace, on V-E Day he knew that the war had ended and the struggle had begun.

APPENDIX I

COMMENDATIONS AND CITATIONS

Headquarters Army Ground Forces
Office of the Commanding General
The Pentagon, Washington, D. C.

17 January 1946

SUBJECT: Letter of Appreciation
TO : Commanding General, 84th Infantry Division

A grateful nation can ask no more of its armed forces than the type of courage, self-sacrifice, and devotion to duty displayed by the officers and men of the 84th Infantry Division. From its initial action in Holland to the meeting with the Russian units beyond the Elbe River, the combat record of the 84th is one of gallantry.

The Allied World will long remember the gallant stand of the 84th in and around Marche, Belgium, during von Rundstedt's all-out attempt to break through the Allied lines. How the division held, and lashed back through sleet, snow, and rain is an outstanding accomplishment in its history.

In rapid succession Baal, Matzerath, Hoven, and Golkrath were taken by the 84th in its drive to the Rhine River. Crossing the Rhine in March, 1945, the division set the Elbe as its next objective, which it achieved four days after the capture of the city of Hannover. It is noteworthy that in 171 days of combat the 84th captured more than 70,000 prisoners.

It is my privilege to take this opportunity, upon your inactivation, to commend you, your officers, and your men for your splendid contribution to our hard-earned victory over the forces of tyranny and aggression.

JACOB L. DEVERS
General, USA
Commanding

24 January 1945

Brigadier General Alexander R. Bolling
Commanding 84th Infantry Division
A. P. O. No. 84, United States Army

Dear Alex:

Upon relief of the 84th Infantry Division from the VII Corps, this date, I want to express my keen appreciation of the splendid job performed by the division during the past month of fighting in the battle of the Ardennes.

Moving down on short notice from north of Aachen, the 84th Division secured the line: Marche-Hotton, and, in conjunction with the 3rd Armored Division, covered the concentration of the remainder of the VII Corps. Marche and Hotton were key spots on the line of the advance of the enemy to the Meuse, and von Rundstedt's spearheads made repeated attempts in late December to seize these vital road centers. But the hastily organized position of the 84th Division held, and at the few points where penetrations were made, the enemy tanks and infantry were quickly sealed off and destroyed. At the end of a week of tense action, the front line hadn't budged an inch. Marche and Hotton were still firmly secured.

When on January 3, 1945 the First Army passed to the counteroffensive, the 84th Division, with the 4th Cavalry Group attached, fought in close cooperation with the 2nd Armored Division along the west flank of the VII Corps. In spite of the bitterest weather yet experienced on the Western Front, the division with great skill took all

objectives assigned in the minimum of time and with great loss to the enemy. With the capture of Laroche on 11 January, the enemy was denied one of the principal crossings of the Ourthe River, after which the 84th Division and attached troops quickly cleared the remainder of the river northwest of Grande Mormont. During this period, two regiments of the division while attached, in succession, to the 2nd Armored Division, materially assisted in the capture of Houffalize.

After only a brief rest, the 84th Division was again committed to action on the east flank of the VII Corps. In two days of brisk fighting, important road center of Beho, one of the focal points on the north flank of the German salient, was captured. The division thus played an important role in closing out the ill-fated attempt of the German Fifth Army to break through the Ardennes.

I and my staff have been greatly impressed by the high morale, the cohesive teamwork and the evident "know how" of "The Railsplitter" Division. Please express to your officers and men our admiration for their fine fighting spirit and our sincere hope that we may soon have you with us again in the VII Corps.

J. LAWTON COLLINS
Major General, U. S. Army
Commanding

Headquarters Ninth U. S. Army
Office of the Commanding General
APO 339

330. 11 GNMCS 15 March 1945

SUBJECT: Commendation.
THRU : Commanding General, XIII Corps, APO 463, U. S. Army.
TO : Commanding General, 84th Infantry Division, APO 84, U. S. Army.

1. Last November the 84th Infantry Division succeeded in making a name for itself in the course of a very few days when in its first operation, it reduced the enemy strongpoint of Geilenkirchen, thereby facilitating the advance of the Army to the Roer River. Again your division distinguished itself when it was thrown into the "Battle of the Bulge."
2. It affords me extreme pleasure to make note of another fine performance turned in by the 84th Infantry Division during the execution of operation "GRENADE" just concluded. Your speedy installation of bridges and expeditious seizure of key towns east of the Roer River contributed greatly toward getting the operation off to a successful start. Thereafter your rapid advances, accomplished despite an extraordinary exposed left flank, were among the outstanding features of the entire operation. Your division was one of the few engaged which fought its way all the way from the Roer River to the Rhine River, never losing its momentum.
3. The fine record made by the division during the recent operation requires no embellishment. However, I wish to make record of my deep appreciation of the splendid performance of the task assigned to the division, and to commend every officer and man for his individual contribution.

W. H. SIMPSON
Lieutenant General, U. S. Army
Commanding

330.13 1st Ind

Headquarters XIII Corps, APO 463, U. S. Army, 21 March 1945
TO: Comanding General, 84th Infantry Division, APO 84, U. S. Army

In forwarding the above commendation from the Army Commander which has my

whole-hearted concurrence, I wish to say that the superior performance of your division in operation "GRENADE" contributed immeasurably to the successful completion of the Corps mission.

A. C. GILLEM, JR.
Major General, United States Army
Commanding

Headquarters 84th Infantry Division

APO 84, U. S. Army
2 July 1945

General Orders
Number 166

I. Unit Citation, Third Battalion, 334th Infantry
II. Unit Citation, Company "G," and 2nd Platoon, Company "H," 334th Infantry

I. Unit Citation, Third Battalion, 334th Infantry: Under the provisions of Section IV, War Department Circular 333, 22 December 1943, as amended, and in accordance with second indorsement, file 200.6, Headquarters Ninth United States Army, 15 June 1945, the Third Battalion, 334th Infantry, is cited for extraordinary heroism, gallantry, determination and esprit de corps under unusually difficult and hazardous conditions in Germany, 23 February to 5 March 1945.

Assigned the mission of spearheading a major portion of the swift advance between the Roer and Rhine rivers, the battalion encountered and defeated considerable enemy resistance with a stubborn determination that contributed materially to an advance of 42 miles to the banks of the Rhine in a period of 12 days. Crossing the Roer River in the second wave on 23 February, the Third Battalion pushed through to launch an attack on a strategically important German town, which they captured in the evening and successfully defended by night against a bitter enemy armored counterthrust. Two days later the battalion assaulted the next town and two smaller villages and, despite dogged hostile opposition, secured these objectives with a brilliant display of courage and coordination among the troops. When the enemy withdrawal turned into a rout thereafter, the battalion, joining a Task Force, carried their offensive 10 miles in a single day, overrunning several more German towns and villages and taking an enormous toll of the enemy as captured, killed, or wounded. On 1 March the battalion attacked and gained control of the next objective, moving on in the motorized column with little additional resistance until two days later when considerable hostile resistance was encountered at night near a large German city. Despite the fact that the troops had obtained little rest during this period, they successfully neutralized the hostile positions and continued their aggressive action with the successful repulsion in bitter hand-to-hand combat of an enemy counterattack on 4 March. The following day elements of the battalion captured another large, strategically located city on the Rhine River, culminating a hazardous but brilliant advance in which the battalion completely smashed enemy forces, destroyed considerable equipment and secured a vast amount of invaluable ground.

The conspicuous bravery, dauntless determination and endurance displayed by the Third Battalion, 334th Infantry, against stubborn enemy resistance enabled them to accomplish a mission which made it possible for Allied forces to press on, deep into Germany, and exterminate the resisting enemy forces. By this exemplary action, the highest credit is reflected upon this unit and the military service of the United States.

II. Unit Citation, Company "G," and 2nd Platoon, Company "H," 334th Infantry: Under the provisions of Section IV, War Department Circular 333, 22 December 1943, as

amended, and in accordance with second indorsement, file 200.6 UC/74 GNMAG, Headquarters Ninth United States Army, 21 June 1945, Company "G," and 2nd Platoon, Company "H," 334th Infantry, are cited for extraordinary heroism, gallantry, determination and esprit de corps under unusually difficult and hazardous conditions in Germany, 23-28 February 1945.

Participating in the regimental spearheading of the Roer River crossing and highly instrumental in the ensuing successes of the regiment during which it captured six towns and villages, Company "G" was flushed with victory and enthusiastically engaging in operations of a task force when it was selected to attack a strategically important German town midway between the Roer and Rhine rivers. Advancing on the town, the company was suddenly subjected to machine gun fire from several well-prepared enemy installations. An officer daringly made his way to a position near one machine gun, and by use of grenades, eliminated the gun and crew, but other machine gun fire cost him his life in this bold action. Unable to advance further in its original direction due to this fire, the company commander, aware of the situation, directed his second platoon to flank the enemy line of defense. Ensuing actions found the company assaulting the hostile positions from two sides which resulted in a bayonet fight. In this operation, the company annihilated 51 German troops, captured 17 and eliminated the resistance in their path, thereafter securing their objective with minor engagements offered by scattered enemy forces. The following day, Company "G" again spearheaded an attack on another German town. Following a short mortar preparation, the unit began its advance but was quickly subjected to intense enemy 88 mm and machine gun fire from positions directly in the path of the company. A squad leader, realizing the impossibility of his company advancing against this resistance, exposed himself to the fire and dashed to a forward position where, despite the fact that he was wounded in this movement, he skillfully used grenades to neutralize the crews of the 88 mm gun and its protective machine gun installation. With this major resistance neutralized, the company continued forward until one platoon, attempting to flank the town which was the objective, became exposed to additional hostile machine gun fire. Re-routing itself, the platoon managed to work its way into the town and clear out resistance to enable remaining elements of the company to enter and complete the capture of the town and establish a security defense. The intrepid individual actions, superior coordination and dauntless courage displayed by the men of Company "G," and 2nd Platoon, Company "H," 334th Infantry, reflect great credit upon the military service of the United States.

By command of Major General Bolling:

L. W. TRUMAN
Col GSC
Chief of Staff

Headquarters 84th Infantry Division

APO 84, U. S. Army,
1 September 1945

General Orders
Number 202

Unit Citation, Company "K," 335th Infantry

Under the provisions of Section IV, War Department Circular 333, 22 December 1943, as amended, and in accordance with fifth indorsement, file 200.6/U, Headquarters Seventh Army, 28 August 1945, Company "K," 335th Infantry, is cited for extraordinary heroism and determined action against the enemy in the Siegfried Line, Germany, 29 November to 2 December 1944.

In order to establish a bridgehead across the Roer River at Linnich, it was necessary to drive the enemy from the village of Lindern, a mile and a half to the northwest. The 335th Infantry was assigned the mission of capturing Lindern; Company "K" was one of the two companies which led the attack. It was necessary to cover about 2,500 yards of flat, exposed ground in a thick fog and a virtual swamp of mud before the village itself could be assaulted. An hour and a quarter after the jump-off, three platoons were able to slip through the enemy's defenses and dig in along the northern outskirts of Lindern—two of them from Company "K." All communication to the rear was cut off because the radios were damaged by enemy fire. When the enemy discovered the presence of these forces, the fire of every available enemy weapon was brought down on them. Later, enemy forces infiltrated back into the town, snipers were extremely effective and an almost continuous artillery barrage of unusual intensity added to Company "K's" dangerously exposed position. Several voluntary efforts by patrols were made to report the situation to battalion headquarters. After the failure of several patrols to reach their destination, two officers successfully passed through enemy sniper fire and arrived at battalion headquarters, but it was impossible to dispatch reinforcements to the area. Meanwhile, other units of the battalion, without knowledge of the beleaguered company's position, called for a concentrated artillery preparation on the town. The Germans, manning pillboxes in front of Company "K's" foxholes, massed reserves under the company's observation and launched a counterattack with tank support. Company "K" valiantly withstood every one of the enemy's efforts, despite dwindling supplies of ammunition and the numerical superiority of the enemy force. The company steadfastly stood its ground for 84 hours until sufficient friendly forces were present to make its relief possible. It was completely encircled and isolated for at least 10 hours, the nearest friendly forces more than a mile away. On the morning of the third day, the enemy launched his heaviest counterattack, but Company "K," using its last rounds of ammunition, again repulsed the attempt. When the company was relieved on the fourth day, it had suffered more than half of its original strength in casualties. By aggressively holding its ground, however, Company "K" was directly responsible for the success of the regimental operation as a whole and largely contributed to the achievement of the Corps objective at Linnich. The valiant action, aggressiveness and determined fighting spirit displayed by the men of Company "K," 335th Infantry, reflect the highest credit upon the unit and the military service.

By command of Brigadier General Church:

J. A. Channon
Lt. Col GSC
Acting Chief of Staff

Headquarters 84th Infantry Division

APO 84, U. S. Army
10 October 1945

General Orders
Number 224

Unit Citation, First Battalion, 334th Infantry

Under the provisions of Section IV, War Department Circular 333, 22 December 1943, as amended, and in accordance with second indorsement, file AG 200.6, Headquarters Seventh Army/Western Military District, 27 September 1945, the First Battalion, 334th Infantry, and supporting personnel from the 326th Field Artillery Battalion and Cannon Company, 334th Infantry, are cited for extraordinary heroism and determined action against the enemy in the drive from the Roer River to the Rhine River, 23 February-5 March 1945.

The First Battalion, at 230330 February 1945, against positions well prepared over

an extensive period of time, launched the Ninth Army offensive by crossing the Roer in assault boats. Heavy enemy artillery fire resulted in direct hits on two boats, the loss of the battalion commander, and the loss of many engineer guides and boat personnel; however, the battalion completed the crossing ready to advance in less than half an hour. Under devastating enemy artillery fire, over flat terrain subjected to automatic weapons fire from a dangerously exposed right flank, the First Battalion cleared Korenzig by 0830 and Rurich by 1410. Before midnight on 23 February 1945 the First Battalion started a move 2500 yards north to Baal to repel a strong counterattack supported by direct tank fire against the remainder of the regiment. At 240430 February 1945 the battalion regrouped in the southwest section of Baal, and, amid severe artillery shelling and sniper fire, constituted a rear and left flank defense. By 1615 on 25 February 1945 the First Battalion had moved to and captured Hetzerath, 2600 yards north of Baal, from a fanatically resisting enemy force. In addition to many dead and wounded littering the town, Hetzerath was cleared of over 300 prisoners. The night of 25 February 1945 and 26 February 1945 were spent in consolidating positions and establishing contact with flank units. On 27 February 1945 the battalion, Company "A" riding on the lead tanks of the 771st Tank Battalion, constituted the lead elements of Task Force Church, which initiated the Roer-Rhine break-through, and thrust forward 20 kilometers before dark. The many prisoners and civilians streaming to the rear were evidence of this battalion's aggressiveness. By 281700 February 1945 the First Battalion, brought up to the left flank of the Second Battalion which had passed through by pushing forward relentlessly on foot when the road was blocked, had destroyed or captured an enemy force east of Waldniel consisting of 500 troops and seven tanks and self-propelled field pieces. At 010535 March 1945 the First Battalion again detrucked and assisted in clearing Boisheim. Again on 2 March 1945 at 1400 this tank-riding battalion led off heading due east for the Rhine. East of St. Tonis an encounter with a strong enemy force of eight self-propelled 88-mm. guns and 200 infantrymen caused the loss of four tanks on which First Battalion personnel were riding. A total of eight tanks ridden by First Battalion men had been put out of action. Swinging north again toward Mörs on 3 March 1945, the battalion passed through the Second and Third Battalions and broke up the Germans' last desperate counterattack west of the Rhine. The battle of Mörs continued throughout 4 March 1945 with the First Battalion flanking to the left through heavy artillery and intense automatic fire. At 050255 March 1945 the battalion reached the bridge site where at daylight 400 enemy troops were cleared from surrounding buildings. In ten days of almost continuous movement and combat, this battalion, in constant contact with the enemy, with the loss of the battalion commander and two rifle company commanders, in spite of fatigue and casualties, made an assault crossing of the Roer River and, by forever keeping its spirit to advance and its will to fight, spearheaded the 84th Infantry Division in the rapid break-through to reach the Rhine River.

By command of Major General Bolling:

L. W. Truman
Col GSC
Chief of Staff

APPENDIX II

COMMAND OF THE 84th INFANTRY DIVISION
1 October 1944 to 8 May 1945

Commanding General	Major General Alexander R. Bolling
Assistant Division Commander	Brigadier General John H. Church

GENERAL STAFF

Chief of Staff	Colonel Louis W. Truman
Assistant Chief of Staff G–1	Lt. Colonel Joseph E. Williams Lt. Colonel Hilmar A. Pressler
Assistant Chief of Staff G–2	Lt. Colonel Donald W. Coons
Assistant Chief of Staff G–3	Lt. Colonel Ole W. Danielson
Assistant Chief of Staff G–4	Lt. Colonel James A. Channon
Assistant Chief of Staff G–5	Major Tazewell Taylor Major Frank E. Green

SPECIAL STAFF

Adjutant General
  Lt. Colonel Bertie E. Craig
Chaplain
  Lt. Colonel Kenneth M. Sowers
Chemical Officer
  Lt. Colonel John W. Mann
Division Engineer
  Lt. Colonel Marvin L. Jacobs
  Lt. Colonel John H. Morava
Finance Officer
  Lt. Colonel Robert C. Ewbank
Inspector General
  Lt. Colonel Winchester Kelso
  Major Oscar D. Howell
Judge Advocate
  Lt. Colonel Bruce Shorts Jr.
Ordnance Officer
  Lt. Colonel Ivan J. Wassberg
Headquarters Commandant
  Lt. Colonel Tillman T. Smoak
  Lt. Colonel Hayden C. Jones Jr.
Division Quartermaster
  Lt. Colonel Donald S. Himes
Signal Officer
  Lt. Colonel Winfred A. Ross
Special Service Officer
  Captain Harry D. Kalbfleisch Jr.
  Captain Robert O. Pohl
Division Surgeon
  Lt. Colonel John D. Dupre
  Lt. Colonel Richard H. Jones
Provost Marshal
  1st Lieutenant John J. Ridge
  Major Bert Perrin
Headquarters Company Commander
  Captain William R. Burlingame
Ordnance Company Commander
  Captain Ary J. Van Harlingen
  Captain Vincent J. Smithwick
  1st Lieutenant Anthony T. DeGusta
Quartermaster Company Commander
  Captain Clarence A. Sather Jr.
Reconnaissance Troop Commander
  Captain Arthur F. Korf
Signal Company Commander
  Captain Clarence E. Bethke

DIVISION ARTILLERY

Division Artillery Commander
  Brigadier General Charles J. Barrett
Executive Officer
  Colonel Alfred B. Devereaux
S–1
  Major Hilmar A. Pressler
  Major Francis E. Murphy
S–2
  Major Douglas B. Robichaux
S–3
  Lt. Colonel David E. Jones
  Lt. Colonel Harry J. Hubbard
Battery Commander,
    Headquarters Battery
  Captain David E. Watson

325th FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

Battalion Commander
  Lt. Colonel Harry J. Hubbard
  Major Herbert I. Stern
Headquarters Battery Commander
  Captain Oakley R. Schrimshaw
  1st Lieutenant Robert C. Becker
"A" Battery Commander
  Captain Harl L. Reese
"B" Battery Commander
  Captain James K. Mills

"C" Battery Commander
Captain Jasper K. Smith
Service Battery Commander
Captain Ferrill B. Early

326th FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Vincent M. Elmore Jr.
Headquarters Battery Commander
Captain Raymond M. Westmoreland
Captain Albert J. Sanders
"A" Battery Commander
Captain Joseph D. Cloghessy
"B" Battery Commander
Captain Clifford C. Mowry
"C" Battery Commander
Captain Edmund M. Dintsch
Captain John S. Neary
Service Battery Commander
Captain Frank T. Kohl

327th FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel William D. Perez
Headquarters Battery Commander
Captain Andrew B. Shelton
"A" Battery Commander
Captain Otis J. Dillon
"B" Battery Commander
Captain Gerald W. Forbes
Captain Charles L. Bostrom
"C" Battery Commander
Captain Carl E. Proctor
Captain Roger K. Chrisman
Service Battery Commander
Captain Clyde C. McClenney
Captain Richard A. Staib

909th FIELD ARTILLERY BATTALION

Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Mario De Maio
Headquarters Battery Commander
Captain Hugh B. Darden Jr.
"A" Battery Commander
Captain Walter G. Downey
"B" Battery Commander
Captain William A. Smyser
"C" Battery Commander
Captain George R. Cernik Jr.
Service Battery Commander
1st Lieutenant Winton T. Keene
Captain Elmer L. Edwards

309th ENGINEER COMBAT BATTALION

Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Marvin L. Jacobs
Lt. Colonel John H. Morava
Headquarters and Service Company Commander
Captain James R. Knepley
"A" Company Commander
Captain Woodrow W. Pratt
1st Lieutenant Seymour S. Deutsch
Captain George R. Doughtie
"B" Company Commander
Captain Irwin F. Schaffhausen
"C" Company Commander
Captain Frank J. Kruse Jr.
1st Lieutenant Alan W. Ker
Captain Allen L. Spafford Jr.

309th MEDICAL BATTALION

Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Henry A. Burstein
Major Leo J. Geppert
Headquarters Detachment Commander
Captain Joseph S. Goodbout
Captain James D. Silvey
"A" Company Commander
Captain Robert N. Coale
Captain Paul S. Blake
"B" Company Commander
Captain Stuart H. Catron
"C" Company Commander
1st Lieutenant Charles L. Bouno
1st Lieutenant Milton E. Haut
Captain Donald P. Bloser
"D" Company Commander
Major Robert J. Day
Captain Irving M. Zindler

333rd INFANTRY REGIMENT

Commanding Officer
Colonel Timothy A. Pedley Jr.
Colonel Lloyd H. Gomes
1st Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Thomas W. Woodyard Jr.
Major Harry G. Benion
Lt. Colonel George A. Dunavant
Lt. Colonel Norman D. Carnes
2nd Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Hubert D. Thomte
Lt. Colonel Daniel P. Norman
Lt. Colonel Ivan Hardesty
3rd Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel William T. Barrett
Lt. Colonel George A. Dunavant
Regimental Headquarters Company Commander
Captain Francis L. Douglass
Service Company Commander
Captain Colin J. Gunn
Anti-Tank Company
Captain John C. Bowen

Cannon Company
Captain Russell C. Spahr
1st Lieutenant Philip W. Purdy
Medical Detachment
Major Charles E. McArthur
Major Robert M. Stump
1st Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain James R. Dague
1st Lieutenant John A. Freeman
2nd Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain Frank Y. Duncan
3rd Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Major William B. Wootton Jr.
1st Lieutenant John W. Fallon
"A" Company Commander
Captain Albert A. Prophet
1st Lieutenant Glenn N. Dodge
1st Lieutenant Kenneth L. Ayers
Captain James R. Dague
"B" Company Commander
Captain Carl W. Kueffer
1st Lieutenant Hamblin Phillips
2nd Lieutenant Buddy B. Sauer
Captain Robert B. Foltz
Captain Carl W. Kueffer
"C" Company Commander
Captain Roy E. Sweitzer
"D" Company Commander
Captain Carlyle R. Williams
"E" Company Commander
Captain James E. Grantham
1st Lieutenant Robert R. Parnell
1st Lieutenant Daniel B. Diament
2nd Lieutenant John F. Pace
Captain Davis M. Smith
"F" Company Commander
Captain John J. Tye
1st Lieutenant Raymond R. Forte
"G" Company Commander
Captain George B. Felton
1st Lieutenant Raymond R. Forte
"H" Company Commander
Captain Baxter L. Baker Jr.
"I" Company Commander
Captain James W. Mitchell
1st Lieutenant Braxton C. Parker
Captain James N. Bradford
"K" Company Commander
Captain George S. Gieszl
1st Lieutenant Harold P. Leimbaugh
1st Lieutenant William D. Masters Jr.
"L" Company Commander
Captain David H. Means
Captain Simon Riesinger
1st Lieutenant William E. Frazer
"M" Company Commander
Captain Stanley E. Burns

334th INFANTRY REGIMENT

Regimental Commander
Colonel John S. Roosma
Colonel Charles E. Hoy
Lt. Colonel Lloyd H. Gomes
1st Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Lloyd H. Gomes
Lt. Colonel Roland L. Kolb
Major Alcee L. Peters
2nd Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel James H. Drum
Major George B. Eleazor
Major James V. Johnston
Lt. Colonel Henry E. Royall
Lt. Colonel Joseph E. Williams
Lt. Colonel Leonard Umanoff
Captain Charles E. Hiatt
Major Eugene W. Hubert
3rd Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Norman D. Carnes
Major Charles R. Murrah
Lt. Colonel William J. Sutton
Captain Andrew C. Elliott
Major Richard H. Price
Regimental Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain Henry M. Cullom Jr.
Service Company Commander
Captain Richard A. Steinhausen
Captain William G. Willard Jr.
Anti-Tank Company Commander
Captain Harry M. Deck
1st Lieutenant Sidney W. Diamond
Cannon Company Commander
Captain Theodore L. Beasley
Medical Detachment Commander
Major Eppie C. Powell
1st Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain Earl L. Jackson
2nd Lieutenant John J. Rowe
1st Lieutenant William W. James
2nd Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain Frank R. Sorahan
Captain S. B. Stone
1st Lieutenant Sheldon L. Palmer
Captain Sam J. Adams Jr.
3rd Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain William M. Polk
"A" Company Commander
Captain Charles L. Foster
2nd Lieutenant William R. Marsh
Captain Woodrow W. Fox

1st Lieutenant Athal E. Burgan
Captain Sam J. Adams Jr.
1st Lieutenant Howard W. Nichols
1st Lieutenant Alexander R. Bolling Jr.
"B" Company Commander
Captain Alcee L. Peters Jr.
1st Lieutenant Robert A. Wagner
"C" Company Commander
Captain Joseph O. Manguno
1st Lieutenant George R. Drago
Captain Woodrow W. Fox
2nd Lieutenant Henry C. DeGrummond Jr.
Captain Earl L. Jackson
1st Lieutenant James K. Eland
"D" Company Commander
Captain Charles Adreon Jr.
1st Lieutenant Don Smith
1st Lieutenant Duncan C. Perkins
1st Lieutenant William S. Miller Jr.
"E" Company Commander
Captain James D. Ledbetter
1st Lieutenant Lauren L. Dustin
Captain Cornelius V. Coady
2nd Lieutenant William W. Thompson
Captain Harry D. Kalbfleisch Jr.
"F" Company Commander
Captain Edward Schultz
Captain Robert C. Weimer
1st Lieutenant John C. Griffin
1st Lieutenant Edward Gedrich
1st Lieutenant Roy H. Oestrich
"G" Company Commander
Captain Charles E. Hiatt
Captain Donald L. Stephens
"H" Company Commander
Captain James V. Johnston
1st Lieutenant Dale C. Lawrence
"I" Company Commander
Captain Gilbert F. Fisher Jr.
1st Lieutenant William M. Jenkins Jr.
1st Lieutenant Lauren L. Dustin
1st Lieutenant Melville E. Watson
Captain Andrew C. Elliott
1st Lieutenant Wallace W. Barnes
Captain Robert C. Williamson
"K" Company Commander
Captain Eldridge C. Dudley
1st Lieutenant Herman R. Scott
2nd Lieutenant Richard S. Bullens
2nd Lieutenant Bruce C. Chapman
1st Lieutenant William H. Davis
"L" Company Commander
Captain Ernest L. Edwards
1st Lieutenant Albert M. Garland
1st Lieutenant Frederick M. McConnell
Captain Andrew C. Elliott
"M" Company Commander
Captain Edward T. Latta
1st Lieutenant Frederick W. Liander
Captain Eldridge C. Dudley

335th INFANTRY REGIMENT

Regimental Commander
Colonel Hugh C. Parker
1st Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel William C. Stone
2nd Battalion Commander
Major Edgar L. Hunter
Major Robert S. Kennedy
Lt. Colonel Charles R. Urban
Lt. Colonel Ridgely B. Bond
Lt. Colonel Birdsey L. Learman
3rd Battalion Commander
Lt. Colonel Robert E. Wallace
Major Gordon A. Bahe
Lt. Colonel Ridgely B. Bond
Regimental Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain Joseph W. Donovan
Service Company Commander
Captain Cecil R. Searcy
Cannon Company Commander
Captain James B. Grace
Anti-Tank Company Commander
Captain James F. Starkey
Medical Detachment Commander
Major Walter T. Tice
1st Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain John L. Keller
2nd Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain William B. Thompson
Captain Harrison F. Nablo
3rd Battalion Headquarters
Company Commander
Captain Charles A. Boswell
Captain Charles J. Ford
1st Lieutenant Leo H. Stahle
Captain Elmer M. Lallinger
"A" Company Commander
Captain Herbert H. Morris
1st Lieutenant Wilbert W. Kohrs
Captain Bartle A. Avery
Captain Joseph R. Darrigo
"B" Company Commander
Captain Harry W. Abbitt
1st Lieutenant Joseph E. Howe
1st Lieutenant James C. Curtis
1st Lieutenant Robert N. Wilford Jr.
1st Lieutenant Joseph R. Darrigo
1st Lieutenant Thomas E. Norton
"C" Company Commander
Captain Angelo J. Conte
1st Lieutenant Max H. Jennings
Captain William B. Wood

"D" Company Commander
Captain Harry A. Gascho
1st Lieutenant Carl E. Karaffa
"E" Company Commander
Captain Dick S. Von Schriltz
Captain William P. Thompson
"F" Company Commander
Captain Cecil E. Johnson Jr.
1st Lieutenant Harold Haaseth
Captain Kenneth E. Johnson
2nd Lieutenant James L. Hodges
"G" Company Commander
Captain Theodore Ketterer Jr.
1st Lieutenant Harold Haaseth
1st Lieutenant Dean A. Gantenbein
"H" Company Commander
Captain Charles F. Hilton
"I" Company Commander
1st Lieutenant George E. Kiley
1st Lieutenant Frederick L. Wiecking
Captain Charles E. Phillips
"K" Company Commander
Captain Oreste V. Valsangiacomo
Captain Leonard R. Carpenter
1st Lieutenant Winther Jorgensen
1st Lieutenant John J. Ennis
"L" Company Commander
Captain Olin G. Dorn Jr.
1st Lieutenant Robert P. Wildes
1st Lieutenant Charles H. Rogers Jr.
1st Lieutenant Winther Jorgensen
Captain Oreste V. Valsangiacomo
"M" Company Commander
Captain James T. Harty
1st Lieutenant Harold F. Matthies
2nd Lieutenant Warren J. Purtzer
Captain Walter L. Fortson Jr.

ATTACHMENTS AND DETACHMENTS

10 November 1944 to 8 May 1945

Unit	*Date Attached*	*Date Relieved*
Sherwood Rangers, Tank Regiment (British)	10 Nov 44	24 Nov 44
171st Engineer (C) Battalion	11 Nov 44	24 Nov 44
753rd Field Artillery Battalion	12 Nov 44	23 Nov 44
B Squadron, 1st Lothians (British)	12 Nov 44	24 Nov 44
A Squadron, 141 RAC (British)	12 Nov 44	24 Nov 44
1st Squadron, 42nd ARE (British)	12 Nov 44	24 Nov 44
691st Field Artillery Battalion	23 Nov 44	20 Dec 44
198th Battery, 73rd AT Regiment (British)	13 Nov 44	23 Nov 44
405th Infantry Regiment, 102nd Infantry Div.	19 Nov 44	24 Nov 44 (2d Bn)
		27 Nov 44 (3d Bn)
		3 Dec 44 (Reg't-)
Company A, 771st Tank Battalion	19 Nov 44	•
113th Cavalry Group	25 Nov 44	20 Dec 44
Company C, 92nd Chemical Mortar Battalion	25 Nov 44	19 Dec 44
17th Tank Battalion	27 Nov 44	30 Nov 44
40th Tank Battalion (-)	27 Nov 44	1 Dec 44 (-B Co)
		6 Dec 44 (B Co)
557th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion	1 Dec 44	27 Jan 45
	2 Feb 45	•
638th Tank Destroyer Battalion	1 Dec 44	•
Battery B, 557th Field Artillery Battalion SP	3 Dec 44	6 Dec 44
473rd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion	1 Dec 44	10 Dec 44 (Bn-)
		18 Dec 44 (A Btry)
		20 Dec 44 (B Btry)
701st Tank Battalion	10 Dec 44	20 Dec 44
771st Tank Battalion	20 Dec 44	22 Mar 45
	2 Apr 45	•
Task Force Doan, 3rd Armored Division	23 Dec 44	1 Jan 45
193rd Field Artillery Battalion	24 Dec 44	12 Jan 45
Company D, 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion	25 Dec 44	24 Jan 45
	27 Jan 45	2 Feb 45

• *Indicates unit remained attached to the division after 8 May 1945*

Company A, 87th Chemical Mortar Battalion	25 Dec 44	24 Jan 45
1st Battalion, 330th Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division	26 Dec 44	1 Jan 45
290th Infantry Regiment Combat Team	2 Jan 45	10 Jan 45
4th Cavalry Group	2 Jan 45	15 Jan 45
18th Field Artillery Battalion	12 Jan 45	17 Jan 45
Task Force Richardson, 3rd Armored Division	20 Jan 45	23 Jan 45
329th Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division	21 Jan 45	22 Jan 45
Task Force Doan, 3rd Armored Division	21 Jan 45	22 Jan 45
730th Field Artillery Battalion	25 Jan 45	26 Jan 45
Troop C, 36th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron	6 Feb 45	23 Feb 45
280th Field Artillery Battalion	6 Feb 45	12 Mar 45
	2 Apr 45	29 Apr 45
95th Division Artillery	8 Feb 45	2 Mar 45
11th Cavalry Group	27 Feb 45	7 Mar 45
605th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed)	2 Mar 45	7 Mar 45
Company C, 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion	22 Mar 45	14 Apr 45
Company B, 3rd Chemical Mortar Battalion	30 Mar 45	14 Apr 45

DETACHMENTS OF THE ORGANIC UNITS OF THE 84th INFANTRY DIVISION

Unit	*Attached to*	*Date Detached*	*Date Reverted*
335th Infantry Regiment	30th Infantry Division	11 Nov 44	26 Nov 44
909th Field Artillery Battalion	30th Infantry Division	11 Nov 44	26 Nov 44
335th Infantry Regiment	2nd Armored Division	1 Jan 45	11 Jan 45
1st Battalion (less Company A), 333rd Infantry Regiment	3rd Armored Division	7 Jan 45	9 Jan 45
333rd Infantry Regiment	2nd Armored Division	10 Jan 45	17 Jan 45
335th Infantry Regiment	3rd Armored Division	18 Jan 45	21 Jan 45
Company G, 335th Infantry Regiment	XIII Corps	21 Mar 45	27 Mar 45
2nd Battalion, 335th Infantry Regiment	102nd Infantry Division	18 Apr 45	23 Apr 45
Company C, 309th Medical Battalion	XIII Corps	11 Apr 45	18 Apr 45

CORPS AND ARMIES TO WHICH THE 84th INFANTRY DIVISION WAS ATTACHED,

12 November 1944 to 8 May 1945

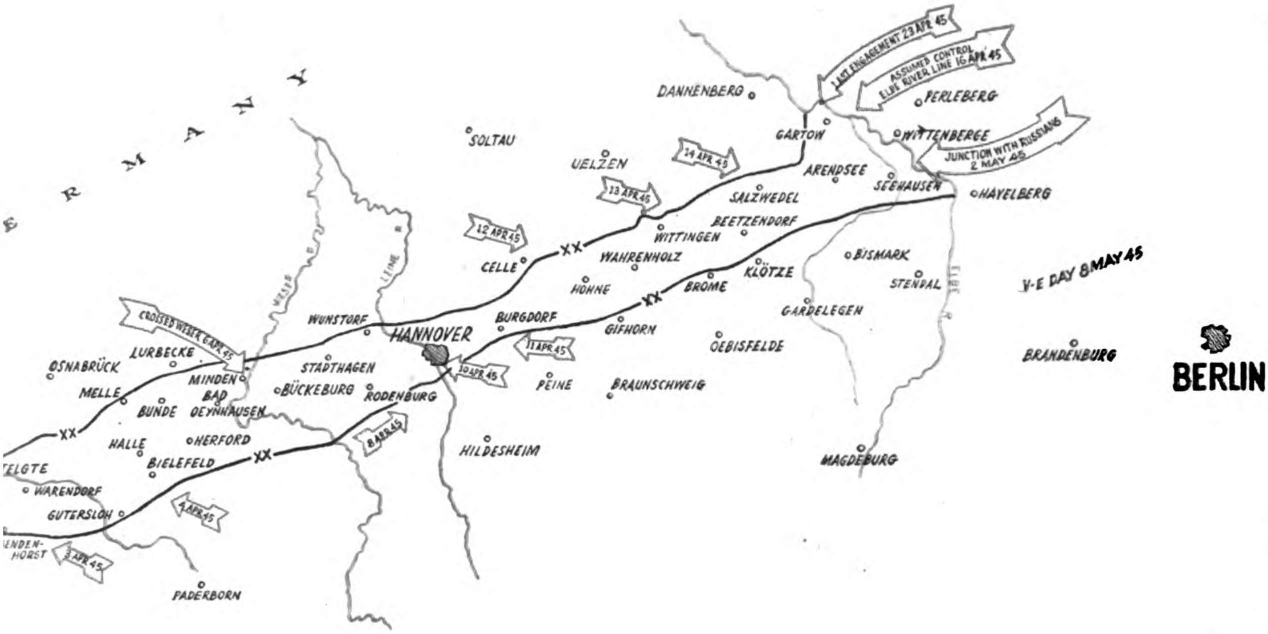
Corps	*Army*	*Date Attached*	*Date Detached*
30 (British) Corps	9th U. S. Army	12 Nov 44	23 Nov 44
XIII Corps	9th U. S. Army	23 Nov 44	20 Dec 44
XVIII Corps (A Bn)	1st U. S. Army	20 Dec 44	22 Dec 44
VII Corps	1st U. S. Army	22 Dec 44	24 Jan 45
XVIII Corps (A Bn)	1st U. S. Army	24 Jan 45	3 Feb 45
XIII Corps	9th U. S. Army	3 Feb 45	*

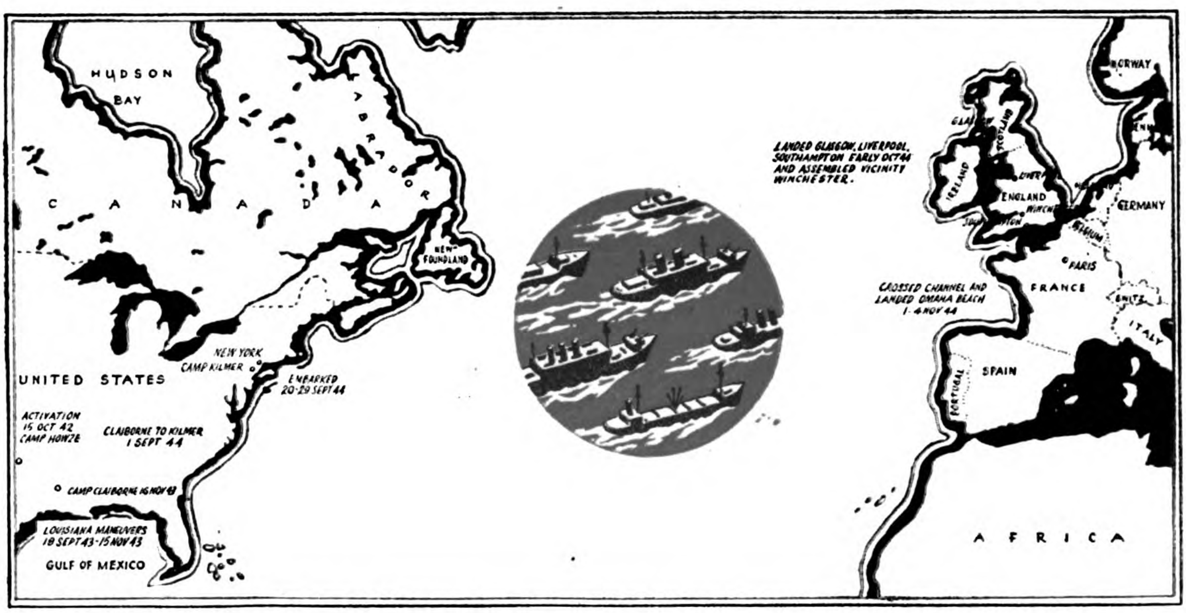
* *Indicates unit remained attached to the division after 8 May 1945*

The 84th Infantry Division

FROM LOUISIANA TO THE ELBE




GERMANY
LAST ENGAGEMENT 23 APR 45
ASSUMED CONTROL ELBE RIVER LINE 16 APR 45
JUNCTION WITH RUSSIANS 2 MAY 45
V-E DAY 8 MAY 45
DANNENBERG
PERLEBERG
GARTOW
WITTENBERGE
SOLTAU
UELZEN
24 APR 45
ARENDSEE
SEEHAUSEN
HAVELBERG
23 APR 45
SALZWEDEL
BEETZENDORF
12 APR 45
WITTINGEN
WAHRENHOLZ
BISMARK
CELLE
HOHNE
BROME
KLÖTZE
STENDAL
GARDELEGEN
CROSSED WESER 6 APR 45
WUNSTORF
HANNOVER
BURGDORF
GIFHORN
11 APR 45
OEBISFELDE
BRANDENBURG
BERLIN
OSNABRÜCK
LURBECKE
MINDEN
STADTHAGEN
10 APR 45
PEINE
BRAUNSCHWEIG
MELLE
BAD OEYNHAUSEN
BÜCKEBURG
RODENBURG
BUNDE
HALLE
HERFORD
8 APR 45
HILDESHEIM
MAGDEBURG
BIELEFELD
TELGTE
WARENDORF
GUTERSLOH
4 APR 45
ENDENHORST
3 APR 45
PADERBORN
WESER
LEINE
ELBE


HUDSON BAY
CANADA
LABRADOR
NEWFOUNDLAND
UNITED STATES
NEW YORK CAMP KILMER
EMBARKED 20-29 SEPT 44
ACTIVATION 15 OCT 42 CAMP HOWZE
CLAIBORNE TO KILMER 1 SEPT 44
CAMP CLAIBORNE 16 NOV 43
LOUISIANA MANEUVERS 18 SEPT 43-15 NOV 43
GULF OF MEXICO
LANDED GLASGOW, LIVERPOOL, SOUTHAMPTON EARLY OCT 44 AND ASSEMBLED VICINITY WINCHESTER.
NORWAY
SCOTLAND
IRELAND
ENGLAND
GERMANY
PARIS
FRANCE
CROSSED CHANNEL AND LANDED OMAHA BEACH 1-4 NOV 44
ITALY
SPAIN
PORTUGAL
AFRICA